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Transindigenous Modernism:
Literature of the Americas, 1929-1945

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Paulina Margarita Gonzales

Committee in charge:

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2016
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Co-Chair

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego
2016
DEDICATION

For my late grandfather, James Blake Moore, who taught me to read in English and Spanish.
Continuing our conversations about language, literature, and history.
EPIGRAPH

“...the feeling was that we need to not only learn each other’s colonial languages, but also each other’s Native languages...”

(Inés Hernández-Ávila and Stefan Varese)
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature page ................................................................. iii
Dedication ........................................................................ iv
Epigraph ........................................................................... v
Table of Contents ............................................................. vi
Acknowledgements ............................................................ vii
Vita ................................................................................ viii
Abstract of the Dissertation ................................................ ix
Introduction: “To The Library” ................................................. 1
Chapter One: The Epic of American Civilizations: José Clemente Orozco’s Critique of Indigenismo ................................................. 37
Chapter Two: “The First Step on the Other Side”: Intellectual Mediation in Todd Downing’s The Mexican Earth ......................................................... 83
Chapter Three: Escribiendo Patria (“Writing the Nation”): Andrés Henestrosa and Neza ................................................................. 121
Chapter Four: Routes of Spirituality: Peyotism in the Works of John Joseph Mathews ................................................................. 169
Coda: Modern Industrial Woman? A Critical Reflection on Mestizo/a-Indigenous Connections ................................................................. 217
Bibliography ........................................................................ 224
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VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Transindigenous Modernism: Literature of the Americas, 1929-1945

by

Paulina Margarita Gonzales

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Gloria Chacón, Co-Chair
Professor Michael Davidson, Co-Chair

Transindigenous Modernism indigenizes the study of literary modernism. It applies the term indigenismo, generally defined as a discourse of assimilating Indigenous peoples in the Americas, to begin with the premise that settler nation-state consolidation and modernization were dependent on assimilating Indigenous peoples culturally and politically. Transindigenous Modernism questions the extent to which Indigenous peoples normalized indigenismo. Using a North-South methodology that brings together English-language and Spanish-language primary sources, theory, and literary criticism,
Transindigenous Modernism interprets artistic and literary productions such as literary criticism, oral traditions, novels, and histories published by American Indian and Indigenous Mexican artists between 1929 and 1945. Through this approach, this dissertation seeks to recover and interpret Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections made through writing, (re)writing, and translation, which are often obscured or under-examined due to the dominance of nation-state paradigms to pursue literary studies. Transindigenous Modernism argues that these transindigenous connections attest to Indigenous peoples’ creative adaptations and contestations to settler nation-state consolidation (indigenismo) and their insistence on modern Indigenous, and tribal-specific, identities and futurities. Traveling intellectuals and writers such as Todd Downing (Choctaw), Andrés Henestrosa (Zapotec), and John Joseph Mathews (Osage), helped shape a North-South circuit of knowledge and cultural production that scholars are beginning to explore and appreciate. In order to capture the historical moment, chapter one examines the discourses of indigenismo and mestizaje in the Mexican, modern artist José Clemente Orozco’s writing and mural, The Epic of American Civilization, at Dartmouth College. Chapter two re-examines the themes explicated in chapter one through the lens of an American Indian narrator traveling south in Todd Downing’s The Mexican Earth. Chapters three and four examine Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections across time and space in the tribal-centric writings of Andrés Henestrosa and John Joseph Mathews. The epilogue explores further questions about mestizo/a-Indigenous connections.
Introduction:
“To the library”
I was surprised when the copy I requested of Andrés Henestrosa’s 1953 publication “El retrato de mi madre,”¹ arrived with the following handwritten inscription: “A la Biblioteca de la Universidad de California en Berkeley. Respeto del Autor… (“To the Library at the University of California at Berkeley. Respect from the author…”). “To the library” sets into motion a whole series of associations. The inscription implies that the text was a gift to the library. But more than a gift, it was sent “to the library” because the author thought people should read it. The inscription connects back to the time Henestrosa was studying in the library at Berkeley, literally walking “to the library” during his first year as a Guggenheim fellow working to phonetize Zapotec and create a Zapotec-Spanish dictionary. The inscription also situates the library as a transnational space: Henestrosa, working in Mexico City, sends the book to Berkeley, California.

Should this text be in the library’s special collections? How was it possible for a signed copy of a beautifully printed text to travel through the UC inter-library loan system from Berkeley to San Diego? My immediate assumption was that the text ought to be stored away and preserved; it was beautiful with its deckled edges and Garamond font. Experiencing first hand how the text, number 73 of 250 signed copies, has moved from Mexico City, to Berkeley, to San Diego, I soon realized that the inscription helps produce a different kind of knowledge about the text. The text became a touchstone for my work. Transindigenous Modernism began to cohere with Henestrosa’s dedication in my hands. I

¹ “Retrato de mi madre” (“Photo of my mother”) is an excerpt from a letter he wrote in 1937 to the pianist Ruth Dworkin. He met her while studying in the U.S. as a Guggenheim fellow.
saw and continue to see Henestrosa’s text as a traveling cultural object whose form and content proposes a theory of transindigenous knowledge production and Indigenous presence through writing. Through its North-South circuit, it highlights the profound social and ethical dimensions that underpin our work as collectors and producers of knowledge to excavate and circulate rather than to close off and store away.

Through a process of recovery and interpretation of texts produced in the early twentieth century, *Transindigenous Modernism: Literature of the Americas, 1929-1945* seeks to excavate a modernist discourse generated by native and non-native writers and artists working within the U.S. and Mexico. Transindigenous modernism is defined as the aesthetic and intellectual expression by Indigenous peoples that contests modernization as another form of assimilation at the same time that it insists on claiming a modern indigeneity that draws its strength from Indigenous pasts to imagine an Indigenous present and future in the Americas. The post-revolutionary, inter-war period of the 1920s and 1930s brings this transindigenous modernist dynamic into sharp relief as it draws attention to a synchronous cultural and political climate of assimilationist policies and ideologies - indigenismo on both sides of the border. The texts under examination are in large part authored by American Indian and Indigenous Mexican intellectuals and artists and include murals, novels, *recopilaciones* (“writing and collection”) of oral traditions, and a growing body of nonfiction writing including criticism and histories. This diverse and multilingual body of work makes valuable contributions to the cultures of the Americas and through its complex negotiations with settler colonial cultures challenges the dominant indigenista perspective of seeing indigenous peoples as objects of research and bodies to assimilate. It is from the theoretical and aesthetic insights of this body of
work that *Transindigenous Modernism* proposes a modernism that can speak back to the assimilationist impulses of Latin-American and American modernism(o).

**Transindigeneity: Crossing Indigenista Borders**

Indigenous artists and intellectuals working in the early twentieth century moved between settler nation-states in the Americas, reinforcing Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections. My attention to American Indian and Indigenous Mexican artists and intellectuals seeks a North-South approach to interpreting these material, intellectual, and spiritual connections between and across Indigenous peoples’ literature. The mestizo and Indigenous artists I have selected to focus on in this dissertation traveled across the U.S.-Mexico border and sometimes used these border crossings in their work. This international border highlights a seemingly neat distinction: the U.S. is “North” and Mexico is “South.” But Indigenous peoples’ history of movement and permanence across the southwest terrain calls into question this division. When using the terms North and South, I am mindful of the ways they signify the configuration of settler colonial nation-states, but I also seek to use these terms in the directional sense of looking to the north and/or to the south toward the vast range of tribal-national territories within the geopolitical bounds of those nation-states. I set up this North-South model in opposition to, in order to intersect and reconfigure, the dominant East-West model of settler

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2 In this formulation, I draw from Inés Hernandez-Ávila and Stefan Varese’s use of “North” to refer to the U.S. and Canada and “South” to refer to Mexico, Central, and South America. The authors seek to create a hemispheric approach to Native American Studies based on the recognition of “a common history and common stories” (86). Their essay offers an overview of a two-part, binational conference held in 1998 in the U.S. and Mexico exploring the theme of a hemispheric Indigenous studies.
colonialism (manifest destiny in the U.S.) and the study of aesthetic modernism as a tradition from Europe that traveled west.

The large questions this dissertation asks require this North-South methodology. What role did Mexican and Indigenous Mexican artists and intellectuals play in U.S. and Mexican cultures? How might American Indian, Mexican, and Indigenous Mexican perspectives enrich our understanding of modern art and literature? Where and how do the concerns of American Indians and Indigenous Mexicans intersect during this period? What Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections were being made during the 1930s, a decade known for indigenismo and a turn in aesthetic modernism towards social realism?

Comparativist and transnational turns in the field of Indigenous studies maintain that ideas, practices, and cultural forms move across and between tribal-national and settler-colonial nation-states in distinct and meaningful ways. The texts under examination here highlight how Indigenous signs and cultures were traveling and made to travel often by the very institutions that sought the assimilation of Indigenous peoples in the first place. The comparativist turn in Indigenous studies has undoubtedly been influenced by the long history of tribal-national contact throughout the Americas, and mirrors – as much as it contests – similar turns in the fields of American and Latin-American studies.

Transindigenous, at its most basic, refers to Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections. But because all terms have their history, it is worth unpacking. Trans-Indigenous is a concept associated with Chadwick Allen. In the same year (2012), Allen authored an essay and book elaborating the term as a way to unsettle the settler-Indigenous binary tacit in settler colonial nation-state literary paradigms (ex. American Studies) and to move beyond comparative analyses of Indigenous-authored texts, that
presuppose “equal” attention to distinct Indigenous traditions. In his book, he elaborates on the possibilities of “augmenting and expanding broader, globally Indigenous fields of inquiry” (xiv). Allen’s trans-indigenous methodology is formulated through purposeful juxtapositions of texts and by engaging multiple art forms and aesthetic systems. Throughout his book, he sets texts side by side from different time periods, tribal-national, and hemispheric affiliations in a two-part project of recovery and interpretation. Recovery and interpretation are processes to “locate our full archive and to recognize its possibilities” (Allen xv). Allen’s motive for this project is to better understand the “mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories and texts” (xiv). His touchstone example in the essay and book is Maori artist Fred Graham’s *Whaka-mutunga (Metamorphosis)*, a mixed-media sculpture of a diving whale; in it he reads a self-conscious trans-Indigenous art that mixes Northwest Coast and Maori design.

Allen’s essay, published as a response to a special forum entitled “Charting Transnational Native American Studies” offers a more oppositional stance about the need to elaborate Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections. Allen questions the rubric of a transnational Native American studies, claiming that it risks creating and replicating a vertical binary relationship between American studies and Indigenous studies. Allen defines this vertical binary relationship as one in which the Indigenous remains connected to the settler-invader, but positioned below it and its system of meaning-making. This vertical binary relationship expresses a power dynamic in which the aesthetic and conceptual standards belong to the settler-invader, tending towards devaluation of the Indigenous pole. This relationship also limits Indigenous mobility and interaction in that it forecloses the possibility of horizontal work, as in working across Indigenous aesthetic
traditions and systems (ex. mobilizing Kiowa, Navajo, and Maori systems to read N.Scott Momaday’s poem “Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919). Allen is cautious about applying a transnational, as well as a comparativist, model to Indigenous studies because Indigenous signs have always traveled across time, space, and generations to be interpreted and re-interpreted in many ways by native and non-native peoples. Rather, he asserts the power of seeking out and interpreting Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections that take readers beyond the parameters of settler nation-state borders to enrich our understanding of distinct, mobile aesthetic interactions.

Following Allen’s terminology, I use the term transindigenous to refer to Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections created in modern literature through writing, (re)writing, and criticism. In this way, transindigenous resembles translation and Gerald Vizenor’s concept of transmotion, the idea of a native, storied presence that moves across time and forms. Indigenous afterlives, a term I also draw from Allen, are created through reading and writing and manifest as important vectors of transindigenous modernism. As a term, Indigenous afterlives refers to interpreting Indigenous-authored texts (and works of art) with an Indigenous perspective. Drawing this idea from a reading of Bill Reid’s poem “Out of Silence” (1971), Allen writes: “Those viewers who bring Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous knowledges to their reading, appreciation, and interpretation help to create afterlives that are themselves indigenous” (3). In “Out of Silence,” the poet refers to a work as having a “real life,” created through the movement, social interaction, and sacred context that gave it “shape” - its form and meaning. But when a

3 Allen quotes the following stanzas: “When we look at a particular work/ of Northwest Coast art/ and see the shape of it, / we are only looking at its afterlife./ Its real life is the movement / by which it got to be that shape.” (2-3).
reader/writer/viewer of this same art engages with it in another life (another time and space), they engage with it on distinct terms. A self-conscious hermeneutics based on Indigenous perspectives and knowledges can create anew rather than recreate that real life. Without referencing the loaded terms sovereignty and autonomy in the essay, Allen theorizes Indigenous aesthetic sovereignty to express how Indigenous cultural productions ought to be understood and appreciated on their own terms even as they engage with multiple meaning-making systems.

*Transindigenous Modernism* focuses specifically on the Indigenous connections made across the geographic area of the U.S. and Mexico, where North and South converge, collide, and collaborate. In this scope, this dissertation is indebted to the theoretical insights of Chicana/o studies scholars who work in a similar geographic and linguistic field. Nicolle Guidotti-Hernandez writes, “…the transnational movement of people, capital, and ideas about difference and power demonstrates that concepts of the nation-state need to be recognized as mutually dependent. That is, nations like the United States and Mexico need to be defined and historicized in relation to each other” (27). This dissertation has a stake in thinking beyond the border, a literal and figurative hyphen that seeks to contain and control the movement of peoples, ideas, and goods.4 The transnational works dialectically with the Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections that move across, beyond, and through the border. Transindigeneity is not always mediated by the settler nation-state, but the nation-state is a hegemonic formation that seeks to

4 Writing within a context of analysis of Arizona Senate Bill 1070 but applicable even to the historical frame under examination, Lai and Smith write eloquently that: “the border is a fiction that divides people with shared histories ore than it divides distinct groups of people from each other” (416)
dictate these connections, particularly in the way that official histories get written and in the policing (or celebration) of Indigenous identities. Because of this inter-play between Indigenous to settler nation-state connections, Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections may not be \textit{a priori} horizontal and mutually beneficial. Transindigenous connections may also maintain vertical-binary relationships in the way they become hierarchized by settler nation-state ordering (or pre-Columbian formations). For example, the Mexican nation-state would most strongly assimilate pre-Columbian Aztec culture into its nationalist narrative as a way to “invent” identity and manufacture consent, a term from Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. This assimilation reflects the dominant geographic position the valley of Mexico played in pre-Columbian and colonial imperial rivalries and nation-state border fixing.\textsuperscript{5} The assimilation of an Aztec past as a national past comes at the exclusion of other Indigenous peoples and their cultures within its territorial bounds, creating Indigenous others in the mestizo state. However, the Transindigenous connections explicated in this dissertation most strongly point to influence, affinity, and interest. As we will see in the chapters that follow, Indigenous identity, cultural practices, and technologies are often inter-dependent across time and space.

Indigenismo exemplifies one of these transnational movements of ideas that create an intertwined U.S. and Mexican history. As a non-native ideology to assimilate indigenous peoples as a part of nation-state consolidation, indigenismo in the early twentieth century was a distinct Pan-American discourse with political and intellectual

\textsuperscript{5} Adelman and Aron describe how imperial borderlands gave way to frontiers, geographic and cultural meeting spaces with undefined borders (816). They clarify these terms to show how imperial rivalries shaped the transitions into North American nation-states.
aims that manifested in governmental initiatives across the Americas. Laura Giraudo and Stephen E. Lewis define Pan-American Indigenismo as a diverse political, economic, and cultural movement that celebrated Indigenous people and their traditions, on the one hand, but usually also called for their modernization, assimilation, and “improvement” on the other (3). Its roots began with the national movements of the early twentieth century in Latin America and took on its institutional form with the first congress of the Inter-American Indian Institute (Instituto Indigenista Interamericano) in Patzcuaro, Michoacán in 1940 (Giraudo and Lewis 3). At the conference in Pátzcuaro, 250 participants represented nineteen countries, but representatives from the U.S. and Mexico, assumed leading roles (Giraudo 13-17). Giraudo explains that U.S. involvement increased in Pan-American Indigenismo after the 1940 conference. Founding the National Indian Institute as part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the U.S. played a large role in establishing institutions throughout Latin America to promote the Inter-American Indigenista agenda and its targeted policy efforts based on knowledge and inter-American collaboration (Giraudo 13). Pan-American Indigenismo, also Inter-American Indigenismo, describes a historical phenomenon of a concerted effort across the Americas to assimilate and modernize Indigenous peoples. The two nation-states influenced each other and exercised power over other nation-states, tribal-nations, and pueblos in the hemisphere. While indigenismo has come under fire for its neo-colonialist impulse, a critique that began in the 1960s and 1970s, indigenismo did result in some social and cultural gains for

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6 Hernández-Ávila and Varese make explicit reference to this meeting as part of their genealogy of hemispheric, indigenous gatherings. See 80-81.
7 These leaders include anthropologists Moisés Saenz and Manuel Gamio, Mexican President Lázaro Cardenas, and BIA Commissioner John Collier (Giraudo 13-17). Darcy McNickle (Salish Kootenai) was another participant from the U.S.
Indigenous peoples; however, the more difficult political goals such as land reform, were often deferred.  

In my work, I drop the hyphenation of Allen’s terminology, from trans-indigenous to transindigenous. This orthographical change is deliberate to distinguish that the modern indigenous-to-indigenous connections in the chapters that follow are inextricably linked to settler-invader meaning-making systems because of their specific historical context. Historically, Indigenous cultural productions and aesthetic systems have been downplayed as “primitive,” but the aesthetic tradition of modernism (an oppositional discourse to bourgeois modernity, more below) represents a shift in the aesthetic and scientific valuation of Indigenous cultures and histories. “Primitive” cultural productions and aesthetic systems become objects for the ethnographic gaze or inspirations for high art. While this topic will be discussed in chapter one, I introduce it here to explain why the idea of Indigenous afterlives is an important vector for understanding the works gathered in this dissertation. The context of post-revolutionary Mexico and its cultural (and political) influence by way of the Mexican muralists pushes the concept of Indigenous afterlives to its limits. In this historical context, we see Indigenous knowledges (or the presumption of access to these knowledges) cleave away from Indigenous perspectives. We see indigenista perspectives, defined as non-native, elitist points of view that “assimilate” Indigenous art and literature into the larger dominant culture; Indigenous cultural productions become a part of national culture to be

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8 See essays by Giraudo, Lewis, and Dawson in the special issue of Latin American Perspectives for a nuanced look at indigenismo’s impact on Indigenous peoples in Mexico, Perú, Guatemala, the U.S., and Canada. 
9 I will also not rule out the possibility that this is the mestiza frame I bring to the conversation even as I work to create Indigenous afterlives.
preserved in literary canons, libraries, and museums. The Indigenous writers I examine grapple with this legacy as they travel throughout the U.S. and Mexico and represent Indigenous afterlives and a native, storied presence (transmotion). As indigenismo shaped non-native assumptions about Indigenous peoples’ literature, we will see how some texts become celebrated in their day (Henestrosa’s *Los hombres que disperso la danza* and Mathews’s *Wah’Kon-Tah*). These texts spoke to indigenista reading practices and assumptions about the vanishing Indian. Other texts, such as Downing’s *The Mexican Earth* were overlooked, in short “buried” in libraries. Rather than seek to revive the “real life” of Indigenous histories, knowledges, and objects like the twentieth century ethnographer, the writers in this dissertation: Todd Downing (Choctaw), Andrés Henestrosa (Zapotec), and John Joseph Mathews (Osage) manifest continuity, creative adaptations and transformations; they create Indigenous afterlives.

The indigenista legacy continues to resonate in the study of literature across fields in the way that those buried texts are now beginning to be explored. I draw attention to one such intersection between modernism and Native North American studies. In Craig S. Womack’s contribution to the collectively authored, seminal text *Reasoning Together*, he reviews a growing body of Native-authored literature, theory, and criticism since the 1960s. In laying down principles for critical Native studies, Womack vis-à-vis the collective defines the pursuit of a materialist criticism with spiritual dimensions that develops historical particulars, and demonstrates commitment to archival work and social realism (*RT* 7-9). These principles articulate a need to read a variety of Native-authored texts from different periods and places. As an Indigenous studies researcher focusing on the early twentieth century, two points stand out to me about Womack’s contribution:
periodizing the Native artist and understanding modernism’s role in mediating a foundational, albeit debunked, story about the renaissance of Native literature; “renaissance” presumes that there was a “dark” period or absence of Native-authored texts. Womack notes that, “By 1973 a critical mass had been reached so that Native people were no longer considered an exclusively historical phenomenon but a modern one” (RT 11). The Red Power Movement and the Native American Renaissance\(^\text{10}\) were integral social, political, and cultural movements that led to the formation of this critical mass and with it, the development of a new consciousness and the rise of the Native artist (Womack RT 12). Second, the canonization of writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko and N. Scott Momaday reflects how their modernist literary techniques such as stream of consciousness and multiple viewpoints appealed to established theoretical modes and reading practices (Womack, RT 15). Writers that did not meet this modernist paradigm were overlooked, resulting in the Native Critics Collective appeal to broaden otherwise narrow frames based on genre and “contemporary” history. Through Womack’s examination of growing book-length criticism, we begin to see how “contemporary” Native American literature was predicated on its proximity to modernism. In my work, these two points overlap. While Silko, Momaday, and James Welch may have translated and borrowed modernist techniques in their novels contributing to their canonization, the transindigenous modernists discussed here diverged from avant-garde and high literary modernism. Downing, Henestrosa, and Mathews were Native artists before the formation of this “critical mass”- made visible as a result of growing Native Studies programs, departments producing Native-centered research and a growing international Indigenous

\(^{10}\) A term coined by Kenneth Lincoln in book of the same title.
rights discourse and corresponding institutions. Yet, their artistry is not separable from their intellectual commitments and indigenista contexts. Through self-fashioning the Indigenous intellectual in literature, Downing, Henestrosa, and Mathews expressed their art. This intellectual-artist formation would explain a body of work dominated by history writing, criticism, and oral traditions-genres that were typically the domain of the ethnographer.

Work by Shari Huhndorf and James H. Cox lend support to the recovery and interpretation processes set forth in this dissertation, and demonstrate a rich and growing field of a hemispheric, transnational approach to Indigenous studies. Huhndorf’s text captures this hemispheric paradigm shift in Native North American studies. Native American literary nationalism represents the major paradigm in the field, through which Cox situates his work. With its origins in the Red Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and work by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and Simon Ortiz, Native American literary nationalism as a literary discourse begins to solidify in the 1990s with publications by Robert Warrior, Craig S. Womack, and Jace Weaver. In a literary nationalist approach, scholars privilege tribal-centric work, meaning that tribal specific traditions and knowledges form a basis for interpreting texts; secondly, literary nationalists work to bridge theoretical and practical applications by working to support sovereignty and linking scholarship to an ethic of accountability to living communities. Huhndorf’s critique of Native literary nationalism exposes several limits, namely that it ignores the larger processes that bring “indigenous communities into global contexts” (3). She argues that its government-to-government focus implicitly grants authority to the U.S. settler nation-state and excludes urban Indians, and Indigenous peoples without federal
recognition—those who are not easily placed within the “nation” (11). Huhndorf argues for a transnational approach to Native literary studies, arguing that it considers larger processes such as imperialism and the movement of capital (2). She notes how post World War II urbanization, relocation, and Indigenous organizing around the UN signal a major shift towards a transnational perspective in Native literary and cultural production that accounts for Indigenous-to-Indigenous alliances and the global contexts (empire and capital) that demand these alliances (2). Anticipating Allen’s skepticism of working within American studies, Huhndorf exposes how the transnational turn in American studies has overlooked Native realities, often focusing on U.S. relations abroad or emphasizing a multiculturalism that erases Native peoples and their land claims (17). Nonetheless, the nation, the transnational, and the Americas are critical sites of inquiry in her work that she maintains can enrich Native North American studies and American studies. Aligned with my approach of centering Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections while contextualizing them within settler nation-state interactions, Huhndorf claims that “… continuities and contradictions between these two orientations – the national and the transnational – have shaped Native cultural production” (2).

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11 To consult her criticism further, see 7-15. Lai and Smith offer a concise summary of the literary nationalist and transnational paradigms in Native literary studies, see 424-425.

12 In their essay, Lai and Smith work from a similar position within American Studies to include Native contributions. Their terminology of “alternative contact” refers to “contact apart from narratives of “first contact” between Native Americans and Europeans (including Euro-Americans) – among Indigenous Americans and other populations in the United States and around the world.” Their terminology offers a critical paradigm to decenter what Huhndorf refers to as a monolithic notion of US culture (Huhndorf 17). However, “alternative contact” may or may not bring us any closer towards creating and recreating Indigenous afterlives of Indigenous texts.
Cox’s book examines these “intertwined histories” of national and transnational forces on Native cultural production through its focus on the American Indian literary and conceptual gaze southward to Mexico. Cox’s work remains invested in the Native literary nationalist paradigm as it shows the creation of a Greater Indian Territory imagined by writers of the period. In his book, Cox examines the work of American Indian writers about Mexico and Indigenous Mexicans, with a robust representation of writers from the 1930s, including D’Arcy McNickle, Todd Downing, Lynn Riggs, John Milton Oskison, Will Rogers, and John Joseph Mathews. His focus on the 1930s contributes to historicizing a period that has been overshadowed by the Native American Renaissance and Red Power Movement in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Importantly, Cox draws attention to the distinct definitions of indigeneity in the U.S. and Mexico. For example, in the U.S. context, there is a legal definition of Indigenous identity based on blood quantum. Until the year 2000 in Mexico, Indians were recognized as such if they spoke an Indigenous language; neither ancestry nor blood were used to determine federal recognition (Cox 5). Natividad Gutierrez describes a phenomenon of “microethnic identification,” referring to Indigenous Mexicans’ use of pueblos, patron saints, and places of origin to self-identify (qtd. in Cox 6). Through Cox’s overview of the differences in indigeneity, he lends support to his argument that to varying degrees American Indians in the 1930s saw Mexico as a place of cultural strength and revolutionary, Indigenous potential. Census records from 1940, for example, indicate

13 Blood quantum, imposed by the US, has been adopted by ⅔ of tribal-nations to determine tribal enrollment (Garroute qtd. in Cox 6). This legal definition has come under fire for replicating the settler’s model of determining who is and who is not an Indian. See Kelsey.
that about 15% of the Mexican population was Indian whereas ¼ of 1% of the U.S. population were counted as Native American (qtd. in Cox 5). These distinct constructions of indigeneity demonstrate how the settler-Indigenous binary manifests itself multiply. It is important to understand how indigeneity gets to be constructed and defined, and by whom. Seen in another way, we might ask: how can Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections be made, recuperated, and appreciated, when it is unclear who or what is Indigenous or how the vertical/binary relationships between settler-invaders and Indigenous peoples play out over time and space?

Cox’s work has contributed to bringing the South into Native North American Literature. Through investigating the intertwined histories of Indigenous peoples, the US, and Mexico, particularly in the 1930s, his work demonstrates what a strictly “nation-centered” approach has hitherto overlooked even as he invokes this paradigm. In contrast to Cox’s work, however, my work begins the process of uncovering not just what American Indians think of Mexico, but what Indigenous Mexicans think of Mexico and the U.S. and how Indigenous Mexicans conceive of each other. Native and non-native writers from the North imagined Mexico as an Indian country, a site of Indigenous authenticity and revitalization. As we will see in the next sections of the introduction and in the first two chapters, many mestizos and indios in Mexico shared similar views.

**Modernity/Coloniality and the Possibilities of Modernism**

Modernism is a cultural term referring to an aesthetic tradition best understood as existing in a dialectical relationship to modernity, a historical term referencing a wide-range of transformations in Western culture that begin from the Enlightenment period.
onward. Both categories are under scrutiny in this dissertation because they underpin the ideology of indigenismo in its rhetoric of assimilation and modernization and through its “invention” of tradition. Walter D. Mignolo contributes the major intellectual premise of this aspect of my work: that modernity and coloniality are not mutually exclusive. What does this modern/colonial matrix mean for modernism, its cultural counter-part? In this section, I will further define these concepts, beginning with coloniality then modernity, to show why modernism, in this dissertation, requires the intellectual and aesthetic modifier of transindigeneity to define and categorize the body of work under investigation to unsettle American and Latin-American modernism. The section ends with a brief analysis of Ruben Darío’s poem “A Roosevelt” to further support this endeavor and transition to how the idea of Latin American and Mexican difference contributed to the construction of modern indigenismo in Mexico and the United States.

In the essay “Coloniality: The Darker Side of Modernity,” Mignolo offers a summary of his recent work on the topic of coloniality. In short, he writes: “modernity is a European narrative that hides its darker side, ‘coloniality.’ Coloniality, in other words, is constitutive of modernity – there is no modernity without coloniality” (39). Mignolo defines “coloniality” as the colonial order of power that operates through the management and control of subjectivities, authority, economy, and knowledge (42, 49). The idea of modernity was construed upon a colonization of time (internal to Europe) and space (external to it) (Mignolo 43). The colonization of time was internal to Europe in the sense that the “modern” was celebrated as something new – apart from the Medieval Ages (Mignolo 41, 43). The colonization of space refers to the “invention of non-European traditions” (Mignolo 41). To elaborate on his own example of the Americas,
the conqueror-narrator\textsuperscript{14} invented the idea of America as a modern construct that “superseded[ed] by conversion, civilization, and later by development” the tribal and hemispheric imaginaries of Indigenous peoples (43). We see the making of a modern continent through the colonial ordering of its originary peoples, who were invented with the name “Indian.”\textsuperscript{15}

Modernity is a historical idea referencing secularization, scientific and technological advancements, the formation of the nation-state, the flow of capital. Mignolo’s work has contributed to expanding these references to include imperialism and colonialism. Matei Calinescu defines modernity primarily in terms of time; the development of a historical sense of time meant that time was perceived as linear and non-repeatable (Calinescu 13). While the term “modern” was coined in the Middle Ages,\textsuperscript{16} Calinescu’s particular focus begins in the mid-nineteenth century where he detects an opposition between the social, capitalist time and the private time of the self—an opposition captured in the sense of crisis and/or alienation (Calinescu 14, 10). Because of the idea that the modern refers to newness, he claims that modernity plays out over a three-part dialectics between tradition, bourgeois civilization, and through the internal transformations of aesthetic modernity (e.g. avant-garde to decadence etc.) (10). In Calinescu’s history of the term modernity, his focus is on the invention of European

\textsuperscript{14} I draw this term from Armando Muyolema, and offer a fuller description of his work in the next section.

\textsuperscript{15} Mignolo develops a line of inquiry that international law solidified the colonial difference, what he defines as the process by which differences are associated with values used to hierarchize humans (48). The colonial difference maintains that some human lives have more value than others (the ontological level) and that some have more of a capacity for rationality than others (the epistemological level) (Mignolo 48).

\textsuperscript{16} Calinescu cites Ernest Robert Curtius, “the older Antiquity became, the more a word for ‘modern’ was needed” (14).
tradition through a colonization of time, a focus that while important nonetheless suppressed the impact of the colonization of space on modernism.

Modernism is an aesthetic tradition that describes the cultural productions simultaneous to but not necessarily aligned with nineteenth and early twentieth century iterations of modernity. Its formation as a word combining “modern” and the suffix “ism” was developed by the defenders of the classical tradition in the eighteenth century, suggesting, “that the attitude of the moderns was biased, that their claim of being superior to the ancients contained an element of dubious and finally disqualifying partisanship” (Calinescu 68). For Jonathan Swift, the term represented “the corruption of English” (Calinescu 69). Calinescu describes that Rubén Darío, the Nicaraguan poet and founder of modernismo, was the first to use the term “modernism” in a positive sense (69). Modernismo was a Latin American literary movement of the 1890s that asserted its cultural autonomy from Spain. Calinescu writes that it was a “synthesis of all the major innovative tendencies that manifested themselves in late nineteenth-century France” (70). Calinescu refers to modernismo in an expansive sense, linking it to European and Anglo-American “modernism” through its interest in modernity. While this definition of modernismo may oversimplify the movement, it has precedence in Spanish-language criticism of the early twentieth century. This view contended that modernismo and its Iberian counter-part were the “Hispanic form of the universal and spiritual crisis started around 1885” (Onís qtd. in Calinescu 76).

My use of the term “modernism” is two-fold. In the first instance, I seek to draw from its power as an aesthetic tradition that results from contradiction and opposition to modernity. In particular, through my focus on Indigenous cultural productions and their
intersection with indigenista rhetoric and policies, transindigenous modernism exists in opposition to modernity/coloniality. It attends to the colonization of time and space, which were intertwined processes. Modernity sought to cut Indigenous peoples off from their own traditions (colonization of time) and from their own lands (colonization of space). In the second instance, I use the term “modernism” in its polycentric sense, consistent with trends to read modernism within a global context of transnational crossings and migration. Transindigenous modernism centers the Indigenous point-of-view emanating from the U.S. and Mexico, where the metropole may be Mexico City or in a not-too distant memory from the Blackjacks. Here North-South intersects with the East-West model. Transindigenous modernism reflects an Indigenous intellectual and aesthetic project to reveal the false ontological and epistemological bases of coloniality. The binary oppositions modern/traditional and civilized/primitive, for example, reflect the colonial encounter with the Indigenous Other: difference made into values and hierarchized according to racist assumptions. Its deepest challenge to modernism is its insistence that the past is a viable source of inspiration in the present; in doing so, it launches it deepest challenge to modernity—a de-colonization of time and space that continues to the present.

From a U.S. perspective, modernism is a relatively late literary-critical formation of the Cold-War period. In its formation, its central assumption was that Modernism had come to an end and that its essence was formal experimentation (Kolocotroni, Goldman, and Taxidou xvii). Modernism continues to be an important category of analysis in its

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17 John Joseph Mathews term referring to the land of the Osage Nation. A Blackjack is a type of Oak tree native to the region.
increasingly transnational, and multi-ethnic dimensions. The work under investigation in this dissertation falls under the periodization of late modernism. As Tyrus Miller defines, late modernism is a historical term that corresponds to literature produced in the late 1920s and 1930s; it is unified by two ideas: a sense of modernism coming to a close and the anticipation or transition into what is considered “postmodern.” Although I do not use the term in my work, the period under examination falls into Miller’s periodization and is an important reminder of the tumultuous political and literary changes occurring from one decade to the next. As scholars have troubled the New Critics’ and New York Intellectuals’ Cold War formation of Modernism, modernism has more accurately become a multiplication of modernisms. What follows is a brief overview of the modernisms that overlap with transindigenous modernism.

Ethnic modernists drew from Ezra Pound’s injunction to “Make it New” as a source to generate their own modernisms. The modernist relationship to the past was a break from the classicist view that good art ought to imitate the great art of the past. Charles Baudelaire, in The Painter of Modern Life, was an important theorizer of the newness of modernism. He writes, “the pleasure which we derive from the representation of the present, is due not only to the beauty with which it can be invested, but also to its essential quality of being present” (1). Because, as he later defines, modernity is ephemeral, fugitive, and contingent, representing the present is an act of being in the now and knowing that now will soon pass (13). A basic assumption of modernists, summed up in Pound’s mantra was that understanding and representing modernity - the world gripped

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18 Mathews, McNickle, and Mourning Dove have been read as ethnic modernists (see Kent, Schedler, and Keresztesi). Ethnic modernists also include Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, Henry Roth, and Louis Zukovsky among many others.
by technological, scientific, and industrial change - required new forms. Ethnic modernists interpreted the injunction in multiple ways because formal experimentation alone could not capture the complex matrix of temporal and social transformations.

Recalling Calinescu’s work, we can define these temporal transformations as emanating from a crisis between social and personal time and the time of tradition. Drawing from Migonolo’s formulation, we can define the spatial transformation as emanating from such experiences as external changes induced by modernization and colonialism and the internal experience of expatriation, migration and urbanization.

Three recent books speak to the proliferation of ethnic modernisms and their attention to the specificity of Indigenous experience. Christopher Schedler argues that modernity begins with the European conquest of the Americas. He defines border modernism as sharing with metropolitan modernism a crisis in representation and the search for a response to this crisis. The “search for a response” points to the recurrent notion that new experiences generate new forms, and Schedler pinpoints three specific strategies that border modernists developed: an emphasis on historical and geographical contexts, a turn to oral forms of expression and the simplification of language. Rita Keresztesi examines texts by immigrant, African-American and Native American writers. She argues that ethnic modernism represents a transitional phase between what is typically urban, Anglocentric High Modernism and a more ethnically, geographically, and ideologically diverse Postmodernism (a shift made perceptible through Miller’s questioning of modernism’s chronology and canon). Alicia Kent argues that ethnic writers in the U.S. sought to come to terms with the dislocating effects of modernity and writing was an act to contest the “negative constructions of these groups as unable to
adapt to modernity” (17). Kent pays attention to the genre choices that ethnic writers made. Often straddling realist and modernist aesthetics, as well as ethnographic, historical, and literary forms, Kent recognizes that ethnic writers were not simply teaching Anglo-American audiences about their cultures, but were experimenting with a diverse set of literary strategies of self-representation.

All three authors draw attention to the importance of geographic and cultural specificities, and offer a broad perspective to understand how different ethnic groups responded to conditions of modernity and coloniality. Native literary productions, as the authors make clear, are different because they are produced in unique circumstances and thus generated their own notions of modernism. Transindigenous modernism enriches this ongoing conversation in the way that it focuses on Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections and creating Indigenous afterlives of texts. In this way, my work de-centers the referent of homogenous American at the center of Ethnic Modernism and questions its premise of inclusion into the US body politic by scrutinizing the nation-state. In contrast to Ethnic Modernism’s interpretation of American Indian literature, Stephen Park’s recent work describes the high modernists relationship to the Indigenous past. Park uncovers how the literary avant-garde in the U.S. drew on Mayan and Aztec artifacts to formulate a Pan-Indian heritage outside of the European one (Park 25). Although the term “Mayan Revival” refers specifically to an architectural style of the 10s and 20s, Park uses the term to describe a broader period of “Mesoamerican modernism” beginning with the Chicago World Fair of 1893 in which archeological findings and sites influenced American culture. Park’s work is useful for highlighting the primitivist logic underpinning U.S. based and Mexican based notions of modernism. Just as Americans
(people living in the U.S.) looked to an Indigenous past to define themselves in
contradistinction to Europeans, a similar movement to re-valorize Indigenous pasts was
occurring in Mexico. Applied to the Mexican context, “Mesoamerican Modernism”
would refer to the indigenista discourse and its practices to grant the post-revolutionary
nation-state a sense of legitimacy and identity outside of the Díaz regime, characterized
by the continuation of coloniality and accommodation to foreign intervention.
Indigenismo was buttressed by the archeological findings that were used to create an
uninterrupted history from Aztecs (and sometimes the Mayas) to modern Mexicans. In
the U.S. context, it did not matter if the archeological artifacts were discovered in
Mexico; they were part of the “American” continent and could thus be safely housed in
U.S. institutions like universities and museums. U.S.-based indigenismo, as in Mexico,
ideologically invested itself with “Indians of the past.”

Like modernism, modernismo presents a counter-part genealogy to
Transindigenous Modernism. In this configuration, I do not seek to create a vertical
relationship between modernismo and modernism, but to underscore how they both drew
on Indigenous pasts in the Americas to define themselves from Europe (and each other).
Chronologically speaking, modernismo offers a precedent. With the publication of Azul,
in 1888, the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Dario launched modernismo. Dario’s “A Roosevelt”
(“To Roosevelt”) (1904) is well-known for its critique of U.S. intervention and
encroachment into Latin America.\(^{19}\) It offers an example of how the aesthetics of
modernism normalized the appropriation of Indigenous symbols in its time-centered

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\(^{19}\) Translations of the poem are by Derusha and Acereda in *Songs of Life and Hope/
Cantos de vida y esperanza* (2004).
focus to distance itself from the colonial past. In doing so, modernism de-coupled these symbols from their histories of resistance and assimilation, contributing to the continued colonization of space. Darío composed “A Roosevelt” (“To Roosevelt”) with seven stanzas of varying lines (8, 6, 5, 10, 16, 5, 1). The poem is written in free-verse, with the occasional use of alternative rhyme and slant rhyme to create coherence within stanzas. In the opening stanza, for example, Darío uses an ABCBDBEB rhyme scheme with the words cazador (“hunter”), Nemrod (“Nimrod”), invasor (“invader”), español (“Spanish”). Throughout the poem, Darío relies on the use of the apostrophe to speak directly to President Theodore Roosevelt, the symbol of U.S. imperialism; Roosevelt is the hunter, “one part Washington and four parts Nimrod,” the future invader of Latin America (l.4, 6). And as or because he is a hunter, Roosevelt is “Primitivo y moderno, sencillo y complicado” (“Primitive and modern, simple and complicated”) (l.3). In this one line, Darío anticipates a central paradox of American modernism, the aesthetic other half of U.S. modernization and colonization. How can something be both primitive and modern?

The primitive has been used to define the modern, setting off a chain of binaries such as barbaric/civilized, tribal/national, backward/forward thinking, and dark/white. But Darío draws attention to how Roosevelt’s modern identity contains within it, his own primitiveness; he is the hunter who relies on violence for his own self-definition. Darío refers to indigeneity in contradistinction to the primitive. In the same opening stanza, Darío shifts to a sarcastic tone, ventriloquizing U.S. perceptions of Latin America as “…ingénua que tiene sangre indígena, que aún reza a Jesucristo y aún habla español” (“guileless America of indigenous blood/ that still prays to Jesus Christ and still speaks Spanish” (7-8). The poetic voice assumes a paternalist tone that berates Latin America for
“still” being backward, as in religious (Catholic), non-English speaking, and overwhelmingly, Indigenous. If the U.S. is the future invader of Indigenous/Catholic Latin America it is only because it already hunted their Indigenous peoples— the primitive as modern.

Dario reinscribes indigeneity as an asset of Latin-America should the U.S. find Latin America to be a threat. In the fifth and longest stanza in the poem, Darío constructs a history of Latin America that blends Indigenous and Hellenic cultures, linking the myth of Atlantis with Mesoamerican cultures. In Darío’s case, this blending of cultures was a strategic move to prove that Latin America had a long and rich history; it is a powerful move in so far as it functions to contest U.S. claims of cultural superiority. However, Latin American history is defined against North American history, a move that erases the presence and contributions of Indigenous peoples. The blending of cultures further breaks down when Darío makes further allusions to Indigenous figures of Latin-America. He writes, “…. America of the great Moctezuma, of the Inca, / the fragrant America of Christopher Columbus/Catholic America, Spanish America/the America where the noble Cuauhtemoc said: ‘this is no bed of roses’” (38-42). In these lines, Darío blends Aztec and Incan histories of resistance to achieve a sense of Latin American’s long history. It erases multiple colonial encounters between Indigenous peoples and settler invaders to resist the imperial encounter between the U.S. and Latin America. Darió’s poem exemplifies the modernist impulse to assimilate the Indian into the settler-invader’s history, re-colonizing time and space.
1929-1945: Convergence and Transindigenous Connections

After the Mexican Revolution from 1910-1920, Mexico was sharply divided along political, class, and ethnic lines and was significantly in debt. The process of nation-state formation was about constructing a nation from out of this chaos with a homogenous sense of identity and culture that could be part of the modern family of nations on equal terms. The Great Depression in the U.S., roughly from 1929-1939, was engaged in a nation-state project of its own. In this final section, I offer an analysis of José Vasconcelos’s seminal text *La raza cósmica: misión de la raza iberoamericana* as an ideological map that anticipates the ways the “indio” would be central to Mexico and U.S. nation-state formation. Published in 1925, and re-published in 1948, the text unpacks the racialized identity formations that will be central to my analysis of the indigenista context in subsequent chapters. *La raza cósmica* highlights the discursive interplay between continental and nationalist definitions of identity and their linchpin of “the Indian.” *La raza cósmica*, in many ways about a struggle to define Latin America, is simultaneous to post-revolutionary, Mexican nation-state formation and is as much about the struggle to define Mexico in contradistinction to the U.S. This is the scale at which its reverberations are most strongly felt given that Mexico and the U.S. collide materially at the border.

Vasconcelos inherited the aesthetic and intellectual premises set out in Dario’s poem. The central thesis of *La raza cósmica* is that racial mixing amongst the distinct races of the world would lead to a new type of human (9). For Vasconcelos, this racial mixing is at once biological and metaphysical, representing the aesthetic and spiritual perfection of the human. As he notes, much of his argument is supported with intuition,
which he opposes to fantasy and the narrow-minded concerns of the sciences. For strategic reasons, Vasconcelos aligns himself as anti-science because his own theory of the new human contests the notion of genetic-perfection that underpins the claims to Aryan superiority circulating across the trans-Atlantic world. During a time when race denoted an innate and fixed biological identity subject to hierarchization, Vasconcelos’s argument attacks the naturalization of that hierarchy just as he confirms it. Even before *La raza cósmica*, Vasconcelos had a highly visible position in the post-revolutionary Mexican government as Secretary of Education from 1921-1924. His vision of mestizaje would inform the nation-state’s philosophical and legal construction of the mestizo and the indio. In post-revolutionary Mexico, the mestizo was defined as the ideal citizen symbolically of mixed ethno-racial and cultural backgrounds but distinctively nationalistic in culture and language. Indigenous authenticity lent legitimacy to the discourse of mestizaje. Indios, as Guillermo Bonfil Batalla writes articulates a colonial relation: the indio is the colonized. It is a Western concept denoting a colonial ordering of the globe; it erases tribal-specificity, or as Gutiérrez might explain, the “microethnic identification” of Indigenous Mexicans. The “indio” in Mexico was the undervalued pole in the settler-Indigenous binary, representing backwardness and an affront to modernity.

Like Darío’s poem, Vasconcelos’s essay draws on the conceit of a battle for the continent. The white race, which will ultimately serve as a “puente” (“bridge”) amongst the four races, is nonetheless divided into two factions that reflect the imperial difference: the sajones of the north, meaning those living in North America as descendants of and inheritors of British Imperialism and the latinos of Latin America, the descendants of and inheritors of Spanish Imperialism (16). This war over the continent is about control over
the geography of the continent, the very material base that the white race has presumably conquered. But Vasconcelos is careful to elide the materiality of his land-grabbing claims given the binary opposition he sets up: the materialistic, warrior-like Anglo-Saxon of the cold North, and the intellectual, spiritual Latino of the tropical South.

At the core of Vasconcelos’s racialized struggle for the continent is the indio. Working within the discursive parameters of mestizaje in post-revolutionary Mexico, of which he helped set, Vasconcelos sees Indigenous communities as elements to be synthesized into the new national protagonist: the mestizo, the symbolic receptacle for the modern, intra-racial citizen. Vasconcelos begins the essay with a review of the myth of Atlantis. This move is strategic for two reasons: to stake a latino/mestizo claim to the continent and to stake this claim based on a notion of descent. Vasconcelos lays bare the “ficción inventada,” the fiction propagated by the European fathers that the continent is new and therefore conquerable; a fiction, we might say reading alongside Ernest Renan, is an originary narrative of forgetting, to create a continent- America. Vasconcelos recognizes the geological ancientness of the continent and claims that Indigenous communities are heirs of Atlantis. But this critique does not lead him to denounce colonialism. Rather, fundamental to Vasconcelos’s worldview is that different “races” serve their purposes and then are destroyed; he considers the monuments left behind by the ancient Egyptians, Mayas, and Aztecs as evidence for this historical inevitability. He writes, “En la Historia no hay retornos, porque todo ella es transformación y novedad. Ninguna raza vuelve; cada una plantea su mission, la cuple y se va” (“there are no returns in History because it is transformation and novelty. No race returns; each one

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20 See Lund’s overview of Renan.
begins and completes its mission and then its gone”) (24-25). Colonialism speeds up the process of destruction and sets into motion the process of mestizaje that will lead to the creation of a new human.

The sajones of the north, according to Vasconcelos, are at a disadvantage because they exterminated their Indigenous populations. For Vasconcelos, the sajones are a strong and prodigious people, but they lack the nuance that, he surmises, comes from racial mixing: “…cometieron el pecado de destruir esas razas, en tanto que nosotros los asimilamos, y esto nos da derechos nuevos y esperanzas de una misión sin precedente en la Historia” (“they committed the sin of destroying those races, when we have assimilated them, and this gives us new rights and hopes in a mission without precedent in History”) (26). In his claim to assimilation, Vasconcelos normalizes colonial violence in Latin America as he condemns it in the North. Vasconcelos fails to connect how Indigenous populations in Mexico, his own country, were also undergoing violence at the hand of the state. He observes the reality of a growing mestizo population and ignores the de facto segregation of its Indigenous population. The larger point Vasconcelos is trying to make is that those in the North could have learned something from their Indigenous communities. Indigenous peoples serve an instrumental value to impart spiritual wisdom and guide them along their mission, but they also have value because they have awoken from their reverie after watching the fall of Atlantis (26, 51). Vasconcelos uses the myth of Atlantis to stake a “legitimate” claim to the continent.21 His argument is as follows

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21 Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, upon visiting the Taos Pueblo in New Mexico, held the view that the “red” man was a descendent of Atlantis, and held the secrets to living a life that would help Americans survive the ravaging effects of modernization.
“our” Indians are descendents of the Atlantic people, with whom “we” have mixed, and they are bound to be destroyed again through the inevitable process of mestizaje. The Indian is, in other words, a transhistorical bridge, at once bridging the past and the present, and the present to a pre-ordained future: “el indio no tiene otra puerta hacia el porvenir que la puerta de la cultura moderna, ni otro camino que el camino ya desbrozado de la civilización latina” (“The Indian has no other door to the future than that of modern culture, nor any other road than the road already cleared by the latin civilization”) (Vasconcelos 25).

The battle over the continent as expressed by Darío and Vasconcelos is a struggle against US empire, but it masks the neo-colonization of space that is nation-sate modernization. Huhndorf recognizes that Native Studies challenges the legitimacy of the US and the Americas, and an Indigenous perspective from Latin America launches a similar critique that challenges the legitimacy of Latin America. As Armando Muyolema C. describes, the struggle over naming the continent began when the conqueror-narrator named Abya-Yala “America.” The conqueror-narrator staked a claim of discovering a “new world” ready to be made in Europe’s image. As the Old-World was doubled, it remapped itself onto a continent that already had (and has) a long-history of first peoples with their own ways of imagining the continent and local places. Their presence and ways of knowing had to be erased to make lived worlds into empty land. Muyolema writes that this struggle over representation continues to create pain; he writes, “…hasta la actualidad, lastima la sensibilidad y la memoria de los pueblos originarios del continente” (“even today, it pains the sensibility and the memory of the original peoples of the continent”) (328). In Kuna, as Muyolema describes, Abya-Yala means “tierra en
plena madurez” “(land in full maturity”) (329). Muyolema writes that Latin America was and is an ideological and cultural concept. He defines that it is produced along two borders: The struggle against the Anglo-Protestant “North,” and the continued legacy of civilizing Indigenous peoples (329). In many ways, we might say that “America” – the ideological and cultural construct of the U.S., is produced along similar borders: against the European Old World, against a Latin America that is assumed to be ambivalently European and Indigenous, and against the populations of colonized Native peoples within the nation’s geo-political borders.

Vasconcelos’s primary legacy to indigenista thought on both sides of the border is that a modern Indian is a whitewashed Indian, a non-Indian. But rather than a fiction based on blood as we see in Vasconcelos’s work, assimilation was enforced through a liberal project of development (modernization), through language, education, literacy, and land-reform. Joshua Lund offers a compelling overview of the relationships between race and space in Mexico’s ongoing project to create a liberal democracy. As the title suggests, Lund’s works traces the structural formation of Mexico, its institutions and sovereignty, and to the symbolic formation of a national family and subjectivity (xv). The title also refers to the capitalist accumulation that underpins state formation and “sustains itself by drawing upon a discourse of race” (xv). This last idea is helpful for thinking through Vasconcelos’s narrative about a battle over the continent. If Latinos are also “white,” the mestizo figure is a way of redirecting this whiteness; he is racialized to forget the originary violence of conquests and to make invisible the ongoing violence of capitalist accumulation.
Vasconcelos’s text would have strong reverberations on both sides of the border. American Indian and Indigenous Mexican writers in particular would question many of its central premises, including its representation of sleepy or decimated Indigenous peoples, the meaning of mestizaje, its inevitability, and assumed directionality towards whiteness. In the chapters that follow, I do not present a chronological order of events from 1929-1945. Rather, I am interested in clustering concerns and intellectual projects along a north-south (and south-north) axis, beginning with the distinct and messy appropriations of indigeneity by mestizo artists and intellectuals and moving to the work of Indigenous writers and intellectuals living in the U.S. and Mexico. My use of the 1929-1945 timeframe in the title of my dissertation reflects the publication timeline of my primary sources as a way to center Indigenous cultural productions. A brief overview of the chronology is as follows: In 1929, Andrés Henestrosa, the Zapotec intellectual whose work I examine in chapter three published Los hombres que dispersó la danza. José Vasconcelos ran for the Mexican presidency and lost. And the U.S. stock market crashed, initiating the Great Depression. In 1934, José Clemento Orozco completed his mural at Dartmouth College. Lazaro Cárdenas became President of Mexico. U.S. Congress approved the Indian Reorganization Act, which excluded Oklahoma Indians. In 1940, Todd Downing published The Mexican Earth. Native and non-Native participants convened in Pátzcuaro, Michoacan for the First Inter-American Congress. By 1945, John Joseph Mathews published Talking to the Moon. World War II has come to an end.

My readings of Darío and Vasconcelos as well as the brief timeline of texts and key nation-state events show the “intertwined histories” or thematic and historic points of convergence between U.S. and Mexican nation-state formation and the formation of a
modern American geography based on race. In the chapters that follow, I point out how native and non-native writers began to chip away at these formations while contributing to an impressive body of transindigenous expression of their own. These transindigenous connections not only link their historical moment to the past, but as we see in Henestrosa’s handwritten inscription, they continue to resonate today.

Chapter 1, “The Epic of American Civilizations: José Clemente Orozco’s Critique of Indigenismo,” examines the murals and autobiography of José Clemente Orozco, the mestizo artist from Mexico and one of the most well-known muralists of the Mexican mural movement. I begin with a mestizo artist because he had the privilege of travelling between the two nation-states and, unlike many American Indians in the US, was granted freedom of expression in his commissions at private universities. Thus, his perspective as a Mexican immigrant working within the U.S. during the early 1930s, lead him to create and promote a new kind of literacy regarding American history and identity. I argue, however, that while Orozco resisted the politics of indigenismo, he elevated the figure of the mestizo, the mixed race person of Spanish and Indigenous descent at the expense of living communities of Indigenous Mexicans and American Indians. In my recuperation of Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections, I conclude the chapter with an overview of the form’s adoption across time as a visual and spatial medium, connecting the Mesoamerican world with the modern Indigenous one.

In chapter two, “The First Step on the Other Side: Intellectual Mediation in Todd Downing’s The Mexican Earth,” I examine Todd Downing’s history and travelogue, The Mexican Earth (1940). This chapter continues a dialogue with the themes of chapter one: history writing, indigeneity, mestizaje, art, and space. Downing’s conversation about
Mexican and American history is presented from the perspective of an American Indian narrator traveling through Mexico. In this chapter, I argue that *The Mexican Earth* is a text about intellectual mediation that draws from English-language and Spanish-language sources about Mexico and Indigenous Mexico to rewrite many of its basic assumptions. In his project, Downing actively sought out Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections by contesting nation-state borders and representing the past and living presence of Indigenous peoples in Mexico.

In Chapter three, “Escribiendo Patria (‘Writing the Nation’): Andrés Henestrosa and Neza,” I examine Andrés Henestrosa’s contributions to *Neza*, a Zapotec literary journal published in Mexico City, that circulated across the capital and the Isthmus of Oaxaca. Henestrosa was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in the 1930s to phonetize the Zapotec language and studies in the US. His work in *Neza* is a mixture of literary criticism and *re-copilacones* (the writing and collection of) the Zapotec oral tradition. I argue that his work exemplifies a community’s approach to dealing with a decline in Zapotec literacy and using the Spanish language and its alphabet. Henestrosa and his Zapotec community of intellectuals paved the way for the resurgence of Indigenous languages and literatures in Mexico of the latter-half of the 20th century.

In Chapter four, “Routes of Spirituality: Peyotism in the Works of John Joseph Mathews” I trace the legacy of Peyotism as a site of powerful Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections. John Joseph Mathews received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study the conquest of the Americas in Mexico. I track the movement of Peyote in Mathew’s fiction and non-fiction to argue that Mathews assumes the role of an indigenous ethnographer to describe the formation of a new religion amongst the Osage, one of synthesis and inter-
tribal awareness. Peyote is an Indigenous Mexican hallucinogenic with pre-contact roots. Its status as prior to colonization and nation-state formation gave Peyotism its strength to connect Indigenous groups across time and space – a phenomenon that intrigued Mathews.

*Transindigenous Modernism* seeks to excavate Indigenous afterlives of Indigenous-authored texts to read against the grain of indigenismo and its impulse to assimilate through modernization. Through a North-South methodology that draws attention to American Indians’ and Indigenous Mexicans’ travel and connections in literature, this dissertation attests to Indigenous peoples’ ongoing, creative adaptations to settler nation-state consolidation and its attempt to define the hemisphere and intervene in tribal-national territories.
Chapter One:
The Epic of American Civilizations:
José Clemente Orozco’s Critique of Indigenismo

This chapter begins with a look at mestizo-Indigenous connections in literature and art with its focus on the Mexican muralist, José Clemente Orozco, and his mural *The Epic of American Civilization* (1932-1934) at Dartmouth College. The early twentieth century represents an extraordinary rhetorical and representational shift in U.S. and Mexican assimilationist policies and ideologies as represented in the mural. This backdrop of assimilation has a long history beginning with the conquest and colonization of Indigenous peoples and the formation of the U.S. and Mexico as nation-states seeking political and cultural independence from Great Britain and Spain. Constructions of Indigenous peoples as savage, noble, vanishing, or exploited were central to colonial place-making in the Americas because these textual and visual representations served to legitimate colonization and nation-state sovereignty. These representations of Native Others did not go unchallenged. As Indigenous peoples have sought to preserve their lands, histories, and knowledges, they have also staked their claims to modern subjectivities and livelihoods. In this chapter, I offer a closer look at the discourses of indigenismo and mestizaje in Mexico and their movement into the U.S. vis-à-vis Orozco’s work because these discourses relied upon a representation of Indigenous peoples as both an exploited and vanishing racialized class, further complicating the making of modern, Indigenous subjectivities.

Indigenismo and mestizaje have come under close scrutiny by Latin-Americanist and Chicana/o scholars following the recognition that these discourses have elevated and
erased a living Indigenous presence in Mexico. Indigenismo is defined as an elitist, non-native political and cultural discourse in Latin America informed by an ideology of assimilation of Indigenous peoples. The indigenismo I examine is from a specific historical period in a specific settler nation-state of the Americas: post-revolutionary Mexico. During the 1920s and 1930s, the two decades following Mexico’s Revolutionary War, a spectrum of indigenista thought permeated its nation-building efforts. As a spectrum of thought, indigenismo ranged from positions that sought Indigenous cultural revitalization to positions that sought complete cultural and political integration of the semi-autonomous pueblos. Indigenismo was promoted through official policy and worked hand-in-hand with a discourse of mestizaje. Mestizaje, as reflected in the work of the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos, refers to an ideology informing political and cultural expression about the superiority of racial and cultural mixture. Although indigenismo and mestizaje are not synonymous, they share the common end to transform the indio into the modern, mestizo citizen. Mexican indigenismo also influenced the course of Pan-American Indigenismo, a concerted and coordinated North-South effort between the U.S. and other countries in Latin America aimed at assimilation.

Although Orozco would deny the role of story in art, Orozco’s intellectual thought and aesthetics reveal an engagement with a pervasive narrative about modernization as assimilation. Through an examination of his writing and art, I approach Orozco and his work to unpack this narrative. I ask: Can an indigenista text (in this case, a mural) generate an Indigenous afterlife? How are murals a form of storytelling? What are these stories? Who is telling what story and for whom? Scholars such as Renato

22 See for example Saldaña-Portillo, Muyolema C., and Knight.
González Mello, Jacquelyn Baas, John Watanabe, and Mary K. Coffey situate the mural within the broader context of the Mexican mural movement and traditions in Western Art. In my reading of the mural, I build upon their efforts by focusing on the Mexican mural movement’s intersection with indigenista and mestizo politics on the one hand and modernist primitivism on the other. Through close readings of Orozco’s writing and mural, I trace how Orozco’s critique of indigenismo highlights some of the internal divisions of the period. As a mestizo artist enmeshed in the post-revolutionary project of what Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio referred to as “forjando patria” (“forging the nation”), Orozco was himself implicated in indigenista ways of knowing and representing Indigenous peoples at the same time that he staunchly criticized indigenista overgeneralizations of Indigenous peoples and the movement’s social and intellectual outreach. I begin with this starting point because muralism, the genre for which Orozco is most regarded, uniquely captures the temporal and spatial predicaments at the center of transindigenous modernism. As an example of non-native (mestizo) art about the colonial encounter, *The Epic of American Civilization* offers an extraordinary critique of the colonial encounters shaping the Americas at the same time that it illustrates the limits of the indigenista thought shaping its North-South historical moment: a foreclosure of Indigenous futurity for a mestizo one.

**The Mexican Muralists: Mestizo Storytellers**

Muralism, although an ancient cultural form, would be the genre of choice for circulating at the national and transnational levels a modern narrative about Mexican nation-state history and identity in response to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1919). We
can, for example, look to iconic cycles such as Diego Rivera’s *Epic of the Mexican Nation* and iconic panels such as Orozco’s “Cortés y la Malinche” at the Colegio de San Ildefonso in Mexico City. In his seminal essay, “Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*: Mexico, 1910-1940,” Alan Knight argues that intellectuals such as Manuel Gamio, Alfonso Caso, and Andrés Molina Enríquez strategically equivocated mestizaje with nationhood in post-revolutionary Mexico; thus, the mestizo figure, the symbolic and phenotypic mixture of the Spanish and Indian “races,” came to be recognized as the ideal Mexican citizen. This essentialist view obfuscated the presence of other ethnic groups with a smaller demographic presence living in Mexico such as Chinese populations in the north. In this way, mestizaje as an ideology about the superiority of mixed races came to work alongside indigenismo, the state-sponsored movement disseminated through official policies, research, and culture, to assimilate Indigenous Mexicans into the nation-state.

The Mexican mural movement received its start precisely as a pedagogical medium for its power to tell these racialized, nationalist stories visually. When José Vasconcelos was appointed Secretary of Education in Mexico in 1921, he embarked on projects to eliminate illiteracy and to promote the arts as a form of racial and class uplift. These projects were aimed at incorporating the largely rural, monolingual Indigenous populations that represented the pre-modern elements of the nation-state. Ironically, many of the murals are located in institutional settings such as government buildings and

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23 A virtual tour of Rivera’s *Epopeya del Pueblo Mexicano* (“Epic of the Mexican Nation”) can be found at this link: http://virtual.palacionacional.info/. “Cortés y la Malinche” can be viewed at the following link: http://www.sanildefonso.org.mx/museo-digital/recorrido_360.php.

24 In Chapter two, I offer a summary and analysis of Molina Enríquez’s *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (1909) and Manuel Gamio’s *Forjando Patria* as examples of Downing’s intellectual mediation.
universities. Acting as a patron for artists and intellectuals alike, Vasconcelos was positioned to give “Los Tres Grandes,” (Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros) their head start, closely allying the Mexican mural movement with the state. Indeed, Orozco credits Vasconcelos for inviting Rivera and Siquieros back from Europe to embark on the project. With state support, Mexican murals offered a narrative of mestizaje to recount Mexican history and identity; in the process, this narrative “invented” tradition, positing lines of continuity between pre-Columbian civilizations and the modern Mexican-state. The Mexican mural movement helped create a recognizable and coherent set of signs, including pre-Columbian civilizations (encompassing bodies, practices, architecture), conquistadors, Indigenous peasants, and revolutionary soldiers.

The cultural national project of the Mexican mural movement achieved such hegemony in large part because its iconography helped postulate a Mexican ontology. The distinction between indigenismo and “indigenism” is a useful way to understand this ontology. As I defined above, indigenismo refers to a political and cultural discourse aimed at assimilating Indigenous peoples. As a historic phenomenon, the indigenismo under investigation here is a specific socio-political and cultural movement in post-revolutionary Mexico with a concrete practice of assimilating Indigenous Mexicans. Indigenismo differs from “indigenism,” what Sheila Marie Contreras defines as “… the stylistic appropriations of Indigenous cultural forms and traditions by non-Indigenous artists and intellectuals. It differs from primitivism in that the practitioners of indigenism have ancestral and cultural ties – however weakened by the passage of time – to Indigenous people” (24). Contreras argues that Chicana/o artists in the U.S. recuperated indigenist cultural forms “to [represent] themselves as the inheritors of Indigenous
cultural patrimonies … and to [establish] their historical presence in North America as Native” rather than as immigrants (37). However, the archive that enabled Chicana/o artists and intellectuals to create their Indigenous patrimony was mediated by European and Anglo-American “regimes of representation” (Spivak qtd. in Contreras 37). With criollo25 and mestizo privilege in Mexico on the one hand, and American Indian’s claims to tribal lands and identity in the U.S. on the other hand, Chicana/os have found themselves enmeshed in complex notions of citizenship and racial memory. Analogously, although not in identical ways, Mexican elites were searching for a national identity and culture outside of European models to consolidate the patrias chicas (“small homelands”) after the Mexican Revolution. Like Chicanas/os of the 1960s, Mexican artists and intellectuals in the 1930s were looking to Indigenous cultural forms to create a national patrimony – art forms to define a state of being a modern, Mexican citizen. In the Mexican case, the stylistic appropriations of Indigenous cultural forms were informed by both modernist and Indigenous traditions in art. These stylistic appropriations were buttressed by the narrative of Conquistador meets Native Woman, which had the explanatory power to subsume the racialized violence underpinning citizenship and to emphasize the dialectical narrative of two races coming together to produce a new one. An important difference that Contreras’s work makes evident is that many Chicana/o artists self-identify as native whereas Orozco and Rivera distanced themselves from claiming a native identity even as they helped to create lines of continuity through their iconography. Mexican muralists were all mestizo storytellers narrating a story that begins

25 Criollo is a person of Spanish ancestry born in Mexico. The term is used throughout Latin America.
with an Indigenous past and is subsumed by an ongoing theoretical (and biological) mixing.

In his autobiography, originally published in 1945, Orozco identifies how changes in Mexican art responded to the nation-building project. Before and during the Mexican Revolution, the dominant artistic style was academicism. He remembers students painting Spanish landscapes and figures from the Spanish court, laboring over the painting for months at a time so that teachers could compare the painting to a photographic image (31). The Academy, as Orozco remembers, was stuck in a European past venerating the masters. Mexican artists sought to break away from this cycle. Orozco writes:

¿Por qué habíamos de estar eternamente de rodillas ante los Kant y los Hugo? ¡Gloria a los maestros! Pero nosotros podíamos también producir un Kant o un Hugo. También nosotros podíamos arrancar el hierro de las entrañas de la tierra y hacer máquinas y barcos con él. Sabíamos levantar ciudades prodigiosas y crear naciones y explorar el universo. ¿No eran las dos razas de donde procedíamos de la estirpre de los titanes? (Why did we have to be eternally on our knees before the Kants and Hugos? Glory to the masters! We could also produce a Kant or an Hugo. We could also tear out metal from the bowels of the earth and make machines and ships. We knew how to raise prodigious cities and create nations and explore the universe. Were we not from two races that both belong to a lineage of titans?). (A 32)

Orozco uses the reference to mestizaje to support his point that Mexican artists could produce their own masters and models. This point is particularly important because he deploys a rhetoric of mestizaje to stake a claim to producing modern art. In his view, Mexican artists were mestizos, the products of inter-mixing between two industrious peoples. Because they have the blood of these two “titanic” races, Mexican artists could also produce masters and were compelled to represent the world that they know. His

26 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine and tend toward literal translations of the texts.
autobiography demonstrates just how much the introduction and practice of creating modern art in pre-revolutionary Mexico had been a way of taking part in the kind of creole nationalism of the 19th century. To create modern art was thus a way of seeking independence from the masters of the old world and their grip on Mexican institutions of art. In addition, Orozco’s words suggest a temporal break from what appears to be an eternal, European time. The modern mestizo artist would stand in for a new notion and experience of temporality.

Ironically, muralism appealed to Mexican artists precisely because it was a technique from the old world. Orozco pinpoints Dr. Atl as the first artist to bring to the Academy knowledge of modern art, namely impressionism, and a strong enthusiasm for muralism. Orozco writes, “nos hablaba con mucho fuego de la Capilla Sixtina y de Leonardo. ¡Las grandes pinturas murales! ¡Los inmensos frescos renacentistas, algo increíble y tan misterioso como las pirámides faraónicas y cuya técnica se había perdido por cuatrocientos años!” (“he would speak to us passionately about the Sistine Chapel and Leonardo. Those large mural paintings! Those immense, frescos of the Renaissance, so incredible and so mysterious like the Egyptian pyramids and their techniques had been lost for four-hundred years!”) (A 30). Orozco suggests that although the Mexican mural movement started in 1922, the enthusiasm for muralism as an art form had already been part of the Mexican art world in large part because of Dr. Atl’s influence. Dr. Atl, as Orozco reports, was attracted to the monumentality of the form, a quality that would resonate with European artists attracted to Mesoamerican art. Yet, the comparison of muralism to the Egyptian pyramids underscores just how little Mesoamerican cultures
and histories were part of the artist’s imagination. This lack of knowledge would change, and with it, so would modern art in Mexico.

As Mexican artists like Dr. Atl, Rivera, and Siquieros returned from their travels in Europe to learn from the masters, archeologists from Mexico and the U.S. were uncovering Mesoamerican architecture and ritual art. On the one hand, as Orozco claims, Rivera and Siquieros brought knowledge that would be of utmost importance to the project of creating serious, modern Mexican art. He writes that their, “experiencia y sus conocimientos especiales de la Escuela de París [eran] muy útiles y necesarios para relacionar el arte de México con el europeo” (“their experience and specialized knowledge of the Paris School were useful and necessary for relating the art of Mexico with that of Europe”) (A 60). On the other hand, European art was increasingly looking to Mesoamerica because of its monumentality. Jean Charlot, a French artist, traveled to Mexico at the age of twenty-three, and Orozco identifies Charlot as having the utmost modern sensibility in art. Charlot was fascinated by pre-Columbian art (A 23). Orozco remembers that they would walk around the Museum of Archeology to study Aztec sculpture. He writes that Aztec sculpture “lo impresionaron profundamente” (“profoundly impressed Charlot”) (A 60). Orozco continues, “hablábamos por largas horas acerca de aquel arte tremendo que llega hasta nosotros y nos sobrepasa, proyectándose más allá del presente” (“we would talk for hours on end about that tremendous art that arrives to us while surpassing us, projecting itself beyond the present”) (A 60). Interestingly, Orozco attributes a value of timelessness to Mesoamerican art; in contrast to the “old” European art that also represents timelessness, however, he links Mesoamerican art to the present and beyond.
These memories document a historical shift in the attitudes and values Europeans and mestizos had towards “primitive” art and cultures. In early twentieth-century Europe, the rise of an aesthetic-anthropological system lent itself to a growing awareness and appreciation for tribal art. James Clifford argues that the aesthetic-anthropological system was underlined by an attitude that the “primitive world [was] in need of preservation, redemption, and representation” (P 200). In anthropological discourse, the primitive object could signify an entire cultural whole used by anthropologists to represent its tradition and to make claims about authenticity (Clifford P 200). In aesthetic discourse, the primitive object was used to stand in for the category of timeless and universal art, what we see in Orozco’s reference to Mesoamerican art (Clifford P 200). Although primitivism as an art historical term refers to “the interest of modern artists in tribal art and culture, as revealed in their thought and work” (Contreras 16), Clifford’s argument posits that the primitive was a Western object of study. The European aesthetic-anthropological system translated well for the Mexican artists working in post-revolutionary Mexico. Mexican artists were at once influenced by the primitivist turn in modern art from Europe and influenced by the ongoing excavations of Mesoamerican cultures that would instill a sense of pride in their continent and nation-state. The primitivist turn in art prepared the Mexican artists to valorize pre-Columbian artifacts as art; this “new” rather than colonial art would serve the aims of colonizing time and space for the nation-state. In her study of Rivera, which has influenced the work of Contreras, Barbara Braun argues that scholars generally ignore Rivera’s collections of pre-Columbian art and the context of archeological investigations in Mexico (186). She claims that while he thought he was rejecting the colonization of Mexico through his art,
he adapted primitive conceptions and myths (like the surrealists) and was complicit in the removal of ancient artifacts from their cultural contexts (186).

Scholars agree that pre-Columbian artifacts moved into the fine-art category around the 1920s. Braun argues that art criticism generally traces a linear development of modern art from the School of Paris Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism, ignoring “deviant expressions” (10). Her book examines the work by the French Symbolist Paul Gauguin, the English sculpture Henry Moore, the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, and the Uruguayan constructivist Joaquin Torres-Garcia. During the 1920s and 1930s, all of these artists, with the exception of Gauguin, would have been influenced by “well-publicized art and archeology of their time” (13). Both Braun and Contreras agree that Robert Goldwater’s *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (1938) did much to elucidate the influences of African, Oceanic, and some North American tribal art on modern art while denying the influence of pre-Columbian art. Goldwater argued that the early colonization of Latin America made Indigenous art forms less relevant to the art of Latin America; this is an example of the devaluation of Indigenous cultural systems within the settler’s meaning making system as discussed in the introduction. Goldwater’s book influenced William Rubin’s MOMA catalogue, “Primitivism in the 20th Century Art: Affinity of Tribal and Modern Art,” a text that would re-affirm Goldwater’s thesis, and add the claim that pre-Columbian art was created by a court society akin to the Egyptians and not by primitive cultures. Clifford questions MOMA’s construction of an affinity between tribal and modern art. He argues that the MOMA exhibit constructed an allegory of affinity, which was created through its historically narrow selection chronicling the “discovery” of tribal art by
Picasso and other high modernists; this selection, as Clifford explains, comes at the exclusion of Third World Modernisms (196).

When applied to the case of Mexico, the aesthetic-anthropological system worked hand in hand with its Indigenous-based nationalism. Exhibitions and museum collections played key roles in educating the Mexican public to value Indigenous arts and crafts as part of Mexican culture. In Vasconcelos’s first year as Secretary of Education, the Mexican government sponsored a series of celebrations with public displays by artists and intellectuals to celebrate the centennial of Mexico’s independence from Spain (López 23). Rick A. López describes two dominant modes of integrating indigeneity in the national imaginary through his interpretation of the Noche Buena, a night of regional dances and food stalls to celebrate the electric lights and roads in Chapultepec Park, and the Exhibition of Popular Arts, an exhibition of regional crafts. Artists and intellectuals sought popular art and Indigenous crafts either as an important step towards appreciation of “high art” or as works of art in their own right that needed the proper interpretation (López 38-39). López argues that these modes of representing and creating indigeneity idealized Indigenous pasts without acknowledging living Indigenous communities and their cultural practices. The two often competing and overlapping constructions of indigeneity divested Indigenous populations of their cultural autonomy and agency to define themselves. In other words, artists and intellectuals contextualized and interpreted these arts and crafts according to their own models not according to the standards set by native communities. Orozco falls into neither of these two dominant

27 These notions reflect the competing discourses of the aesthetic-anthropological system and lend support to Clifford’s claim that this opposition is systematic (200).
modes: he did not seem to value Indigenous plastic arts as a first step to value high-art or as objects of art awaiting explanation by non-native elites. Instead, Orozco’s writing reveals that he understands that these indigenista moves work to elevate the mestizo.

Orozco offers important insight into this period by outlining the key social and intellectual trends influencing the art world of the 1920s. Mexican modernism, as he identifies, was shaped by forces such as the democratization of art, nationalism in art, the “socialization” of art, Dr. Atl’s strand of militarism in art, and a passion for history and sociology (A 56). The indianization of art, however, captures how indigenismo intersected with modernist primitivism. First, he identifies that “Muchos creyeron que el arte precortesiano era la verdadera tradición que nos correspondía y llegó a hablarse del “renacimiento del arte indígena” (“many believed that pre-Columbian art was the true tradition that belonged to us and people began to talk about a renaissance of Indian art”) (A 56). Second, he elaborates: “Llegaba a su máximo el furor por la plástica del indígena actual. Fue cuando empezó a inundarse México de petates, ollas, huaraches, danzantes de Chalma, rebozos y se iniciaba la exportación en gran escala de todo esto. Comenzaba el auge turístico de Cuernavaca y Taxco” (“The craze for contemporary Indian plastic arts arrived at its maximum furor. This is when Mexico began to be flooded with woven bedrolls, pots, sandals, dancers from Chalma, shawls, which began to be exported on a grand scale. Tourism in Cuernavaca and Taxco was beginning to take off”) (A 56).

Orozco’s tone reveals a sense of skepticism about the notion of an Indigenous aesthetic in Mexico. Indebted to the increasing trade of Indigenous crafts and pre-Columbian artifacts as well as a growing tourist industry around historical, Indigenous sites, the indianization of art was a popular phenomenon. The passage indicates that he did not agree that
Indigenous sites or goods merited this kind of attention. This attitude may have more to do with reinforcing distinctions between high and low art than its indianization per sé.\textsuperscript{28}

Considering his writing about the European masters, we can conclude that Orozco was indeed impressed by Mesoamerican traditions in art but by no means shared the enthusiasm to claim it as the Mexican tradition. As his earlier criticism of the Kants and Hugos attests, Orozco sought a tradition in the mixing of cultures, a mixing that he must have felt was shortchanged by the indianization of art. Put another way, Orozco’s skepticism of claiming a “true” tradition could be read as an indictment on a salvage approach to art: defined as a look to the “authentic” past to intentionally reclaim its styles. True to a modernist sensibility, he could have in mind a more syncretic approach to tradition itself: that it should be created and made new.

Although Orozco did not value the “renaissance of Indian art” or the proliferation of Indigenous crafts, he launched an insightful critique of the manifesto issued by the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors, which was authored by Siquieros and he himself was a signatory (1922). The Syndicate issued their manifesto in Mexico City announcing their aesthetic aim to “socialize artistic expression” (304). They argued that art ought to reflect and create the new order; the decrepit, old, inhumane order was a legacy of colonialism. The Mexican artists sought to create an art that would draw from their “native midst,” a midst that they found to be “the highest and spiritual expression of the world tradition” that the Mexican people had inherited (304). The manifesto thus articulates the promotion of a socially and politically engaged art that, as

\textsuperscript{28} Charlot would launch a similar critique in 1941 about the Indian Arts of the United States exhibit in New York City. Charlot praised its Prehistoric display while denigrating its Living Traditions and Indian Art for Modern Living displays (McLerran 151-153).
Alejandro Anreus, Diana L. Linden, and Jonathan Weinberg observe, paves the way for the social realism of the 1930s. At the same time, the manifesto expresses the self-conscious awareness of a distinctly modern Mexican art in the 1920s. Drawing from its “native midst” in a way that they believed elevated rather than denigrated Indigenous peoples, as had been the case in colonial Mexico and the Mexico of the Porfiriato, modern Mexican art would be public, political, and “indigenous” (304). By drawing attention to modern art as anti-colonial, the Syndicate celebrated modernization because it signaled a break from the Euro-centric models and the inherited racialized ways of organizing peoples. Rhetorically, the Syndicate’s modernism is one of antagonism to a bourgeois modernization. They detached the “modern” from the now widely recognized modern/colonial matrix of power to propose a modern/anti-colonial coupling.²⁹

However, Orozco was quick to point out the contradiction in the Mexican muralists claims to creating an Indigenous art. He observes that the aesthetics and techniques they used were either Italian or Parisian: “Ni uno solo de los pintores de entonces ni de ahora ha intentado siquiera pintar a la manera de los mayas, los toltecas, los chinos o los polinesios” (“Not one painter of that period nor of today’s has attempted to paint in the way of the Mayas, Toltecs, Chinese, or Polinesians”) (A 60). Although Orozco betrays his own indigenista way of thinking by lumping “primitive” peoples together, he recognizes mestizo artists as indigenistas who have not succeeded in decolonizing modern art. They speak a revolutionary and anti-colonial rhetoric presumably to benefit Indigenous peoples (and the working class) without adopting their methods or materials. “Indigenous art” was then reducible to experimentation with

²⁹ See my discussion of Mignolo’s notion of coloniality in the introduction.
abstract forms inspired by monumental forms. This logic of abstraction helped to define a modern Mexican subject and their mestizo culture. At this level of political abstraction, the mestizo artists represented a powerful, national origin myth of mestizaje and (incompatibly) denounced colonialism in one broad stroke.

Although Orozco claims to admire the critical nature of the Mexican muralists, which he claims the manifesto best demonstrates, Orozco elaborates on six of his own points of criticism (A 62). He claims that the manifesto overvalues monumental art forms; he surmises that proletarians probably want to escape their work day, and asks why an artist would then represent proletarian themes, particularly when the bourgeoisie will be the ones buying the art; he questions how art can activate revolutionary potential, how we can do away with individualism, especially when artists take pride in their work, and questions who is influencing whom, the artist or society? (A 63-66). Orozco recognizes that revolutionary art is being asked to do away with too much such as doing away with other art forms and the role of the artist as individual creator, but he also recognizes that its emphasis on class does away with ethnic and regional differences, a move that feeds into romantic notions of the Indigenous other. To quote at length, Orozco writes:

En la época del indigenismo agudo se identificó al indio con el proletario sin tener en cuenta que no todos los indios son proletarios ni todos los proletarios indios, y entonces vinieron los cuadros indoproletarios, también hijos del “Manifiesto” del sindicato. Todos estos cuadros fueron a dar a los Estados Unidos a manos de gente de raza blanca. Ni los indios de aquí ni los de allá tuvieron nunca la menor noticia de la existencia de tales cuadros en que se exaltaba a su raza. En norteamérica llegó a creerse que los pintores mexicanos eran tremendamente populares entre las masas indígenas como pudiera serlo Zapata y aun el mismo Zapata puede ser absolutamente desconocido entre los indígenas de Durango o Quintana Roo. (In the epoch of strict indigenismo the indian was identified with the proletarian without realizing that not all Indians are proletarians nor are all proletarians Indians, so we got paintings of the indian-proletarian, also
“children” of the Manifesto. All of these paintings ended up in the U.S. in the hands of white people. Neither the Indians of here or those of over there had any idea of the existence of these paintings that exalted their race. In North America, people believed that the Mexican painters were tremendously popular with the indigenous masses the way Zapata was believed to be even though Zapata himself could have been completely obscure for indigenous peoples in Durango or Quintana Roo. (A 64)

Orozco identifies a kind of leftist indigenismo that is a consequence of the over-politicization of art. His critique is not to be confused with Aguirre Beltrán’s category of leftist Westernism, the belief that Indians are peasants and need no special treatment (Knight 80). Rather, this kind of leftist indigenismo sought to condemn capitalism by re-inscribing the representation of the indio as a figure of resistance. This move is a kind of cultural primitivism that identifies the Indian as a figure of resistance and an antidote to the ills of modern civilization—capitalism, industrialism, and technology—in short, modernity (Contreras 16-17).  

Orozco also identifies a U.S. primitivist gaze toward Mexico that operates on two assumptions: one, Mexican artists must be well-known by Indigenous peoples because they are championing the “Indian” race, and all Indigenous peoples in Mexico are the same. U.S. audiences bought into the romantic figure of the Indian-proletarian because, as Contreras writes, “The primitive is structured as opposition; through its image, ‘Western’ culture is revealed as spiritually lacking, morally corrupt, misdirected, and self-destructive” and through this opposition, the

30 This figure contrasts with the “indio bárbaro” (barbaric Indian) image that Saldaña-Portilloy discusses. In her work, the indio bárbaro is a figure created and deployed by U.S. imperialism (and the Mexican nation-state) to justify military action. She uses the term “indigenous afterlives” to describe the iterations of the indio bárbaro, from Geronimo (Chiricahua Apache), narcos, and Osama Bin Laden. In contrast to my use of the term, these indigenous afterlives are constructions of the settler invader and its meaning making system.

31 Todd Downing’s The Mexican Earth, case-study in chapter four, will launch a similar critique of Anglo-American indigenismo.
Western self is rejuvenated and enlightened (18). But, U.S. audiences were not the only ones who saw Mexico through a primitivist lens. As the manifesto makes clear, Indigenous art in Mexico was touted as rejuvenating and enlightening an aesthetically lacking and misdirected art associated with colonialism, racism, and capitalism.

Orozco’s critique of indo-proletarian art may have been influenced by his own experience as an object of fascination in U.S. papers. He writes that, “los periódicos Americanos” (“the American papers”) circulated all kinds of untruths about how he had lost his hand and about his political views. While some claimed he lost his left hand while throwing bombs during the war, other papers focused on his assumed indigenist politics. Orozco demystifies these claims, writing: “Hubo varios que me hicieron aparecer como uno de los abanderados de la causa indígena y hacían un retrato de mi persona en el cual podia reconocerse a un tarahumara. Yo jamás me preocupé por la causa indígena, ni arrojé bombas, ni me fusilaron tres veces, como aseguraba otro diario” (“There were various papers that had me look like one of those defenders of the Indian cause and made me look like a Tarahumara. I was never concerned with the Indian cause, never threw bombs, nor was I shot three times, as another paper ensured”) (A 40-41). Orozco contests identification with living Tarahumaras because he is mestizo. The Tarahumaras were the not-yet assimilated peoples into the Mexican body-politic. While Orozco could criticize Anglo-Americans for buying indo-proletarian paintings and indigenistas for elevating Indigenous crafts, he felt justified representing pre-Columbian and Conquest histories because he was creating modern art and because these histories were safely in his past- the Mexican past. As was common in his historical era,
Indigenous peoples and symbols were a part of the official narrative in so far as they were assimilated into the ongoing project of mestizaje as a form of racialized nation-building.

**Orozco in the U.S.**

Orozco first traveled to the U.S. in 1917, in a trip that impressed upon him the stereotypes associated with Mexican and Mexican-American identity and the harassment that went along with them. In his autobiography, Orozco writes that he crossed the border at Laredo, Texas. He had packed about one hundred paintings to sell but sixty of these paintings were confiscated by the border patrol (and never recovered) for allegedly violating a law that prohibited immoral content from entering the country (A 47). With the forty paintings he had left, Orozco traveled to San Francisco where his friend, Fernando R. Galván, bemoaned the paintings’ utter lack of commercial value. While in San Francisco, Orozco was surprised by the Mexican presence. He writes, “Pululaban en San Francisco los mexicanos, a tal grado que con frecuencia se oía en la calle puro español. A los mexicanos nativos de California se unían los exiliados, por lo general víctimas o descontentos del regimen carrancista o bien gentes de Sonora y Sinaloa que querían evitarse las molestias de la Guerra civil” (“Mexicans abounded in San Francisco that with much frequency only Spanish was heard on the streets. The Mexican exiles united with the Mexicans native to California; these exiles were generally victims of or discontented with the carrancista regime or were people from Sonora and Sinaloa who wanted to avoid the troubles of the Civil war [revolution]”) (A 48). Orozco observes that the Mexican population is composed of both Mexicans who are native to California and
Mexicans who have migrated to escape the violence of the Mexican Revolution. Orozco uses the term here to refer to one’s place of birth and not one’s race.

During this first trip to the U.S., Orozco gained insight into the appeal of the indo-proletarian figure. When Orozco visits local saloons, he recognizes that the “bandidos mexicanos más célebres de aquella época [1848]… no eran otra cosa que los desposeídos de sus tierras” (“the most famous Mexican bandits of that era were nothing more than those dispossessed from their lands”) (49). For Orozco, these images are not of romantic or popular figures of resistance but of real people who lost political claims to their land. The stereotype of the Mexican bandido resurfaces with the Revolution. While on a trip to Niagara Falls, Orozco bears the burden of this stereotype. He writes, “… un policía notó algo sospechoso en mi catadura y me pidió mi pasaporte. Al ver que era yo mexicano, pegó un brinco y me expulsó en el acto del Canadá, conduciéndome él mismo a la frontera Americana” (“a police officer noted something suspicious in my look and he asked me for my passport. When he saw that I was Mexican, he jumped and deported me from Canada, driving me to the U.S. border himself”) (A 50). Orozco observes that, “Mexicano y bandido eran sinónimos” (“Mexican was synonymous with bandit”) (A 50).

Thus, Orozco’s first trip in the U.S. was relatively unsuccessful and exposed him to discrimination and harassment. In many ways, these experiences come to bear on his critique of indigenismo in the United States. As noted above with the indo-proletarian art, Orozco must have made the connection that Mexican bandits, like native warriors, and the “indio bárbaro” in Saldaña-Portillo’s work, were acceptable as wall art but threatening as real people.
Upon his return to Mexico, as we have seen in the previous section, the political and artistic climate would be significantly different. As the Mexican nation-state would work to reconfigure itself as a legitimate modern, nation-state, Orozco would be one of the beneficiary’s of this project and secure commissions that would result in renown on both sides of the border. When Orozco decided to return to the U.S. in 1927 in a form of self-imposed exile (and to make money), he was no longer an obscure sketch-artist, but he was not nearly as well known or as well regarded as Rivera. Given the nature of the medium, Orozco could not take his murals with him and needed to find a way to advertise his work. In her detailed study of U.S. influences on “Los Tres Grandes,” during the 1920s and 1930s, Anna Indych-López highlights the role of small-scale media in facilitating the muralists’ commissions north of the border. While Rivera invented the portable fresco, which Orozco took up in 1940 with *Dive Bomber and the Tank*, Orozco was the first of the three muralists to create art consciously for a U.S. audience. Indych-López describes that Anita Brenner commissioned Orozco’s *Horrores*, ink and paper drawings of the violence of the Mexican Revolution, by creating a fictitious U.S. buyer in her letters to him. When his drawings were not well received due to their graphic and seemingly “illustrative” rather than “artistic” examination of violence, Orozco transformed many of the drawings into lithographs. That Orozco turned to lithography is significant because lithographs had been widely popularized by Mexican artist Miguel de Covarrubias during his stay in New York in the 1920s. The switch in medium, the sterilized content, and the support of patron/critics such as Brenner and Alma Reed, all coalesced to jumpstart Orozco’s career in the United States. When Tina Modotti photographed panels of his murals in the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso in Mexico
City, where Charlot would also paint, Orozco could now show his U.S. audience the monumental art for which the Mexican muralists were best known, further solidifying his reputation as a serious artist.

Orozco had completed the murals in the Antiguo Colegio San Ildefonso of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria in 1926, just one year before leaving for his second trip to the United States. Orozco would go on to secure commissions at Pomona College where he completed Prometheus in 1930, five murals known as The New School Murals at the New School for Social Research in 1931, and The Epic of American Civilization at Dartmouth College in 1934. After his second stay in the United States, a stay that spanned seven years, Orozco returned to Mexico where he completed murals at the University of Guadalajara in 1936 among many other works in institutional settings such as the Governor’s Palace in Guadalajara. In the following section, I will conduct close readings of the panels from Orozco’s mural, The Epic of American Civilization. A mural that intersects modern aesthetics, space, and early 20th century identity politics, it is uniquely positioned to help draw out the limits of Orozco’s critique of indigenismo and thus better understand his contribution to transindigenous modernism.

A Mestizo Story at Dartmouth

Orozco’s The Epic of American Civilization is considered one of the greatest mural cycles in the United States.32 In my interpretation of the mural, I read a story that requires both a transnational and a transindigenous lens as I focus on the coda as a visual

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32 A comprehensive tour of the mural, “Dartmouth Digital Orozco,” can be found here: http://www.dartmouth.edu/digitalorozco/.
and narrative “ending” and the meaning its institutional space endows. I argue that through juxtaposition and mirroring of thematic connections across time, Orozco tells a story about the violence inherent to colonial encounter(s) and the promise of a mestizo futurity for the Americas.\footnote{In her audio tour, Mary Coffey elucidates how Orozco uses a mirroring device to represent history as a cyclical process. Watanabe, in his audio tour, surmises that there is no narrative but a mythic representation of simultaneity. Both scholars suggest that Orozco resists creating a linear story, but this view, as I contend, overlooks the coda.}

Dartmouth College’s Hood Museum offers a selection of interpretations of the mural in their official brochure, audio tours, and lectures on their website. Jacquelynn Baas, the former director of the Hood Museum, describes in her contribution how Orozco received the commission. Art faculty members Artemus S. Packard and Churchill P. Lathrop invited Orozco with the support of an art lecture budget; on this first trip, Orozco arrived at Dartmouth College to paint a test panel in March of 1932 (Baas 4-5). After negotiations for funding between the faculty, Alma Reed (Orozco’s art dealer), and the Rockefeller’s, Orozco signed a contract for 5,2000 dollars (Baas 6). Because Orozco exceeded the eighteen-month contract, he was paid approximately 7,5000 for the two-year long commission (Baas 6). In his audio tour, Professor of Anthropology, John Watanabe argues that the mural ought to be contextualized within Mexico’s post-revolutionary historical context. Watanabe describes how Mexicans muralists were part of a process of nation-building, helping to develop an iconography that represents Mexican identity and history. The mural, he says, represents “a profoundly Mexican vision of the epic of American civilization…. Not just Latin American in general, but very Mexican…” Mary Coffey, on the other hand, in an audio tour and article, claims
that the mural represents Orozco’s continental outlook rather than a Mexican nationalist outlook. The mural “reorients” American history, tying it to Indo-Hispanic history rather than Anglo-American history (Coffey TNA 12). The mural, she writes, “gives voice to everything that depression-era colonial revivalists, regionalists, and anti-modernists sought to repress about modern America” such as technology and war (Coffey TNA 12). The tension between these two official interpretations indicates the mural’s temporal and spatial complexity as a North-South cultural production.

Without a doubt, Orozco would be the first to claim that the mural does not tell a story. Orozco writes in The Orozco Frescoes at Dartmouth (1934) that, “In every painting, as in any other work of art, there is always an IDEA, never a story” (emphasis his). While he may argue this position in order to maintain a sense of formal purity, his position falsely separates the visual from writing, particularly the body of writing we have seen thus far. The title, for example, gestures towards narrative; the term “epic” refers to a specific literary form: long, narrative poems recounting historical or mythological narratives. Through the visual, The Epic of American Civilization recounts a mytho-historical narrative about modern, nation-state formation in the Americas, focusing in particular on Mexico.

Beginning with the Aztec migration South, the mural offers a perspective into American history that decenters the North. Panels one through thirteen capture the Aztec-centric perspective uniting North and South. The Aztec migration constitutes a foundational narrative of the Mexican state because it posits the Mexican nation-state as a direct inheritor of the Aztecs (the migration story is also a foundational narrative for Chicano nationalism). Orozco’s iconography of aggressive men and war begins in the
first panel, “Migration.” He depicts the Aztec men with rippling musculature and stern faces, emphasizing the military precision of the migration. The men are in rows and in various stages of movement; the men in the first row thrust forward. No one looks down at the one body that has fallen on the floor in a prostrate position. Is he too tired to go on? Is he thanking the gods for their arrival? Orozco arrests the movement of the figure in the foreground by representing locked knees, but he is not looking down at the one below. Rather, he is differentiated by the reddish-brown tone on his chest and arms, a change in tone that highlights his large chest. Another body in the background is covered in blue war paint, thrusting forward like the spears of the next panel entitled “Snake and Spears.” “Human Sacrifice,” the third panel, further suggests the violence of their migration moving out in all directions from the central valley. The Aztec men are conquerors, too.

Orozco had first imagined the expansive wall-space to tell the story of Quetzalcoatl. Quetzalcoatl was a mytho-historic, Toltec god-king who abhorred sacrifice. In his autobiography, Orozco admits that “El tema inicial era el de Quetzalcoatl, pero las pinturas finales ya no tienen relación muy clara con él” (“the initial theme was that of Quetzalcoatl, but the final paintings have no clear relation to it”) (100). The mural cycle represents his coming as a new moment in Aztec history symbolized by maize, peace, and writing. The peace of the Golden Age, however, is short-lived, represented in two panels as opposed to the four panels representing the period of initial colonization and warfare. In the first of the panels, Quetzalcoatl hovers over the Toltec pyramids of the sun and moon that form the background of men in dialogue and resting. Although the pyramids were already constructed by the time the Aztecs arrived in the central valley, they serve to highlight the power of shared labor to build a new world, an important
theme that I will return to in my reading of “Modern Industrial Man.” The peace represented in the two panels is disrupted by the Aztecs themselves who force Quetzalcoatl to leave. In “The Departure of Quetzalcoatl,” Orozco represents angry, Aztec men in a pyramidal pile of distorted bodies; they are aligned under a red pyramid that represents their return to the bloody practices of human sacrifice and warfare. Quetzalcoatl rides a raft of serpents and, presumably, points eastward to the next panel, “The Prophecy.”\(^{34}\) The waves and several of the serpents’ heads mirror this directional cue. The different positioning of the forms in the panel reflects the tension and fundamental contradiction between Quetzalcoatl’s vision and the Aztecs’ vision of civilization. Had this story alone dominated the 3,000 foot wall-space, there would not have been an epic of the Americas.

Part two of the mural- the modern half- takes up the theme of the invasion of European civilization in the Americas and nation-state formation.\(^{35}\) The panel “Cortez and the Cross” symbolizes the combined powers of the state and the church to discipline Indigenous civilizations. Dressed in armor, Cortez’s body functions like the cylindrical machine, with his hand crushing a pile of bodies. Orozco visually links “Cortez and the Cross” with the panel “The Machine” as these bodies appear to be fed into – to fuel- the machine. Likewise, part of the machine pierces into the back of an Indigenous body in

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\(^{34}\) Miguel León-Portilla’s *Visión de los vencidos* describes that before the Aztecs could “invent” an image to conceptualize the conquistadors, they applied the myth of Quetzacoatl’s return and thus first conceived of them as “dioses” (“gods”) (37). In the mural, Quetzalcoatl points toward the Spanish conquistadors- no doubt a reference to this narrative.

\(^{35}\) In her audio tour, Coffey describes the reserve desk “as a rupture within the narrative, a rupture that coincides with the Spanish conquest, which marks the end of ancient civilization and the beginning of modern civilization.” The reserve desk neatly separates the walls, which Orozco worked with to create an ancient/modern order.
the “Cortez and the Cross” panel. These two panels are thematically linked as Orozco emphasizes the continuity in exploitation, violence, and technologization between the Conquest and modern world.

“Anglo-America” and “Hispano-America,” reflect Orozco’s critique of his historical moment. “Anglo-America” is juxtaposed against “The Machine,” implying the US’s proximity to an overly technologized culture, but the panel itself does not include a technological motif. In “Anglo-America,” Orozco depicts a school-house, a town hall, and two different groups of people. The center of the panel consists of a crowd of adults; corporate-looking men and women in white dresses that appear more like religious robes stand in a circle and face the center. Many of these adults, particularly the faceless corporate men, are represented with their heads down in a reference to submission, possibly prayer. Although Orozco positions the crowd at the center of the panel, he focuses on the group of people in the foreground. The schoolteacher, a woman in a blue dress, is the tallest figure in the panel; her body works to create a high-horizon line like Cortez’s body in “Cortez and the Cross.” Children dressed in uniform surround the schoolteacher- their bodies mirroring the posture of the adults. As Coffey observes in her audio tour, all human figures appear zombie-like because Orozco is critiquing the U.S. as a consensus culture. Orozco juxtaposes this consensus culture with the chaos of “Hispano-America.” Orozco dominates the panel with the image of a Mexican revolutionary, unknowingly awaiting the same fate of the Mexican “bandidos” as a military general is poised to stab him in the back. This panel brings together a history of political corruption; investors—a reference to the foreign investors that President Porfirio Díaz welcomed to the country during his de facto dictatorship—clutch at bags of spewing
gold. One of the generals also clutches a bag of gold, solidifying the panel’s message of Mexico’s ongoing political corruption and instability.

The next panel, “Gods of the Modern World,” makes no reference to a specific nation-state. By juxtaposing “Anglo-America” and “Hispano-America” with a panel that offers a scathing caricature of university culture, Orozco suggests complicity between the intellectual and political elite that foster consensus and instability. In this panel, skeletons dressed in graduation regalia observe one skeletal figure birthing yet another skeleton. Stillborn skeletons in bell jars and heavy tomes line the bottom of the panel. His critique of knowledge-production resonates with its contemporary leftist critique of capitalism as a system that alienates the worker; this kind of knowledge-production alienates humans. However, the panel more readily reflects and broadens his critique of colonial art in the Academy as an art that does not reflect the lived reality of the modern Mexican artist. Orozco may have had in mind the kind of positivist-leaning intellectual circles in Mexico, indicting not just colonial art but all systems of knowledge and aesthetics rooted in colonialism. The panel offers a staunch anti-colonial message consistent with his critiques in previous panels.

Orozco was aware of Dartmouth College’s history as a university whose mission was to educate (read assimilate) Indigenous youth. Muralism, a visual and spatial practice, ties its environment to its content. Moving between migrations and legacies of violence, Orozco’s mural captures the double-colonization of time and space. But there is also evidence to suggest that Orozco was inspired by the local history of the space—

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36 His criticism of the university system as an epistemological site of dead knowledge resonates with Indigenous Studies scholars’ critique of colonialist systems and spaces of knowledge-production. See Tuck, Simpson, and Tuhiwai-Smith.
The American continental races are now becoming aware of their own personality, as it emerges from two cultural currents - the indigenous and the European. The great American myth of Quetzalcoatl is a living one embracing both elements and pointing clearly, by its prophetic nature, to the responsibility shared equally by the two Americas of creating here an authentic New World civilization. I feel that this subject (mixing of indigenous and European civilizations) has a special significance for an institution such as Dartmouth College which has its origin in a continental rather than in a local outlook – the foundation of Dartmouth, I understand, predating the foundation of the United States. (Baas 6)

If his intention was to paint a mural about Quetzalcoatl, the letter indicates how the space of the Baker Library and the history of the space changed his mind about how to fit that subject matter into a larger narrative of racial and cultural mixing. Keeping in mind the mestizo citizen of post-revolutionary Mexico, Orozco suggests that both the mestizo and white “continental races” have a cultural identity rooted in the mixing of Indigenous and European cultures. This common history and identity creates a moral imperative to make a new (read mestizo) civilization. Orozco’s repetition of the word “continental” suggests, as Coffey notes, Orozco’s own hemispheric outlook. This hemispheric outlook however further normalizes mestizaje. Dartmouth College was founded on a “continental” as in European outlook, but Orozco also refers to the Americas-the shared land mass with a common history of biological and cultural mixing between Indigenous and European cultures. Preserving this meaning, Orozco suggests that Dartmouth College was founded on continental awareness and cultural mixing. This “continental” outlook contrasts with

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37 Orozco wrote the letter in English for a May 25, 1932 press release (Baas 6-7).
the “local outlook”- a U.S. nation-state outlook that is at once more regional in perspective and less accommodating to biological mixture.

Yet, Orozco does not romanticize the cultural and biological mixture underpinning the continental personality. In his autobiography, Orozco offers a more scathing critique of Dartmouth’s history. He writes:

> El colegio de Dartmouth, en Hanover, New Hampshire, es uno de los establecimientos educativos más antiguos de la Unión Americana. Fue fundado varios años antes de la Guerra de Independencia de ese país por un misionero que deseaba educar a los indios del lugar, Eleazar Weelock. Llegó con una gramática, una biblia, un tambor y cinco mil litros de aguardiente. Los indios acudieron al sonido del tambor, bebieron aguardiente y se enteraron del idioma y de los evangelios. Ahora ya no queda un solo indio para ser educado por tan buen sistema

Dartmouth College, in Hanover, New Hampshire is one of the oldest institutions of learning in the American Union. It was founded many years before that country’s War of Independence by a missionary, Eleazar Wheelock, who wanted to educate the Indians of the place. He arrived with a grammar, a bible, a drum, and five-thousand liters of aguardiente. The Indians were moved to the sound of the drum, drank aguardiente, and they learned the language and the scripture. Now, there is not a single Indian to be educated for the effectiveness of the system. (97-98)

Orozco’s tone is ironic although not one of lamentation, like his criticisms of indigenismo in Mexico. Orozco emphasizes that colonization, at least at Dartmouth, succeeded in assimilating Indigenous peoples through its educational policies. However, he calls into question the nature of this kind of mixing, which he represents in the mural by highlighting the violence of the colonial encounter. Orozco recognizes that the continental-wide cultural and biological mixing was rather one-sided and wrought through exploitation, manipulation, and genocide.

Indeed, Dartmouth College has its own colonization story, which is central to the mural’s narrative. Dartmouth College was founded to instruct English and Indigenous
students. The University’s “Dartmouth at a Glance” web page briefly notes: “Dartmouth was founded in 1769 by the Rev. Eleazar Wheelock ‘for the education and instruction of Youth of the Indian Tribes in this Land… and also of English Youth and any others.’” The Dartmouth College Charter, signed by King George III, on December 13, 1769, describes the “grand design” to “[spread] Christian knowledge among the savages of our American wilderness.” That Dartmouth was founded to instruct English and Indigenous youth speaks to Orozco’s observation of its “continental” outlook: it was founded on the principle of mixing European and Indigenous cultures for the purpose of assimilating the latter. Dartmouth’s Native American Studies Program boldly emphasizes that within the College’s first 200 years, only 19 native students graduated from the College- a number that was undoubtedly smaller when Orozco would have been on the campus.

Situating Dartmouth prior to the U.S. nation-state implies that it has a legacy in the same decrepit system that, as a member of the Syndicate, he criticized in the 1922 manifesto. While it is unclear what Orozco personally thought about the first peoples in the area other than that they had been thoroughly assimilated, an indigenista of the 1922 manifesto could have perceived the mural as a way of throwing off the colonial legacy in an act of solidarity: one “native midst”- the Indigenous Mexican one- coming into contact with another “native midst” – American Indians. This position would fall in line with mestizo artists’ indigenist notions of themselves as inheritors of an Indigenous Mexican culture. Although Orozco was not immune to an indigenist position, as long as indigeneity was safely in the past, he rejected indigeneity as the basis of a modern Mexican culture and art. While in the U.S., this rejection takes on added significance. Orozco recognizes the violence of mestizaje as a historical premise of colonization but
this does not lead him to want to recover the Indigenous past for the present. Rather, the violence of mestizaje is the underlying basis of a shared responsibility to make a more authentic (perhaps more just and creative) mestizo, New World civilization.

Although there are several panels between “Gods of the Modern World” and “Modern Industrial Man,” Orozco links the two panels with a visual argument about the nature of and the protagonists of this shared responsibility. In the first instance, the two panels are linked with the iconographic motif of the book- a symbol for knowledge, learning, and literacy. Orozco composed “Modern Industrial Man” as a set of five panels, two panels on each side of the central piece of the mestizo/Mesoamerican man of “Modern Industrial Man II.” The theme of the series is that of a society under construction (Hood Museum of Art 12). Reading from left to right, Orozco posits an ambiguous future in which technology can only benefit humanity if it is put to good use by a cooperative labor force (Coffey 14). Set in the middle of a possible future in which labor is crushed by modernization or in which workers co-exist with modernization, the man reads leisurely lying on his side. The book is a hard covered tome, and he holds it with gloved hands, white gloves designed for manual labor much like the dark, heavy fabric of his clothing. The narrative implies that the movement from one future to the next is dependent on “self-directed learning” (Coffey 15). He is presumably “free to set down his tools and pursue his own education and spiritual nourishment” so that he can later take up the same tools and engage in self-directed labor (Hood Museum of Art 11).

However, the racialization of the “reclining figure” complicates the narrative of the entire mural cycle. The tour guide printed by the Hood Museum of Art interprets the “reclining figure” to be of “mixed ancestry – either European and indigenous American,
or perhaps African-American… he symbolically resolves the competing but complementary qualities of North American and Latin American cultures, both European and indigenous in origin” (11). Coffey describes him with the equally ambiguous term “Mesoamerican” to describe that Orozco was really arguing about humanity and “public access to the resources of higher education” (15). She writes that modern industrial man is “identified by his humanity rather than his class or race” (15). Phenotypically, the “reclining figure” could be mestizo, Indigenous, or of African descent. Indeed, up to this point, Orozco has represented many different kinds of bodies. How are we to read the representation of a racially ambiguous “modern man” at the center of alternative futurities?

The category of the modern man or modern human is historically determined and differs in space and time. In the U.S., Captain Richard Henry Pratt’s “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man” proposes whitewashing Indigenous peoples through a boarding-school system that mirrored military camps. But education was not the only site of assimilation; along with changes in federal policy such as the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, it was U.S. policy to “modernize” Indigenous peoples. The U.S.’s larger backdrop of eugenicist thinking and practices further lends support to the notion that the modern U.S. citizen was coded as white (and able-bodied). In Mexico, the modern Indian was a contradiction in terms: the modern Indian was mestizo, conceived of as racially diverse, culturally and linguistically assimilated through education, and an important contributor (laborer) to the country’s economic modernization. The eugenics movement similarly

38 See Dawson’s essay, “Histories and Memories of the Indian Boarding Schools in Mexico, the United States, and Canada.”
moved into Mexico. La Sociedad Mexicana Eugenesia was founded in 1931 but there was a distancing between trans-Atlantic notions of the ideal or normal type and the ideal or normal type that the demographic reality of Mexico made feasible. Alexandra Minna Stern writes that there was a general understanding that Mexico did not need superhumans but normal, healthy citizens- a type that nonetheless privileged whiteness.

That Orozco represents a racially ambiguous modern man is significant because the mestizo figure denies the possibility of an Indigenous futurity. As the prospectus attests, Orozco was influenced by the cultural ideology of the cosmic race, that racial mixture was a precondition for an authentic, modern America. Renato González-Mello writes that “Orozco came from where the dominant discourse made (and makes) racial mixture the ultimate goal of evolution” (34). Because the mestizo figure was an attempt to re-write a colonialist hierarchy of peoples that privileged whiteness, it also functioned to contest the ideology of “pure” races espoused by the trans-Atlantic eugenics movement. In this sense, it is apt that the official brochure claims the mixed-race figure “symbolically resolves” the tensions between North America and Latin America.

However, the mestizo- as an ideal citizen of Mexico through the discourse of mestizaje as well as through Orozco’s politics of creating an authentic continental culture- excluded rather than included Indigenous Mexicans.

This representation exposes the limits of Orozco’s anti-colonialist and anti-nationalist critique, revealing the coda as a modernist vision of settler futurity. In the end, the coda might symbolically resolve tensions for some, but this resolution comes at the foreclosure of an Indigenous futurity- consistent with ongoing colonialist projects that sought to modernize Indigenous peoples on both sides of the border. Eve Tuck and K.
Wayne Yang critique the ways in which scholars take up the term decolonization to stand in for other rights based, social justice issues. Analyzing the rhetorical “moves to innocence” such as adoption fantasies or equivocation implicit in making decolonization a metaphor, Tuck and Yang define decolonization as the repatriation of native lands and people, which entails that settlers give up the power, privilege, and lands accumulated through centuries of ongoing colonization. Ongoing colonization posits a future time and space for settlers, a settler futurity, that does not depart from the history of dispossession but rather is “dependent on a foreclosure of Indigenous futurity” (Tuck and Yang 14). To think about the mural in relationship to decolonization is not an act of measuring up the mural to a twenty-first century political objective; rather, we can locate within the mural its ideology of mestizaje as a move to innocence that imagines a settler futurity.

This view of a settler futurity is consistent with Orozco’s writing about identity, history, and the future of the Americas. In his autobiography, unlike in The Epic of American Civilization, Orozco arrives at a point where he begins to question the premise of mestizaje. He writes, “No sabemos aún quiénes somos, como los enfermos de amnesia. Nos clasificamos continuamente en indios, criollos, y mestizos, atendiendo solo a la mezcla de sangres, como si se tratara de caballos de Carrera” (“we still do not know who we are, as if we were sick with amnesia. We continually classify ourselves as indians, criolles, and mestizos, focusing only on the mixture of blood as if this was a matter of race horses”) (467). Here, Orozco questions the role of blood in determining a nation-state identity as he seems to expose race for what it is: a social construct. He maintains this thought, writing that “La teoría de que México es necesariamente indígena, española o mestizo es una base falsa para definir nuestra personalidad” (“the theory that Mexico is
necessarily indigenous, Spanish, or mestizo is a false basis from which to define our personality”) (A 68). This thought, one that does not rely on a notion of blood but rather culture is far different from his earlier observation in the 1932 prospectus for *The Epic of American Civilization* in which he claims that the continental personality is founded on the mixture of Indigenous and European heritages.

In the above quote, Orozco homes in on the idea that, like the category of the mestizo, the Indigenous and Spanish categories are themselves abstractions. Acknowledging that Spaniards are also a mixed-people, Orozco adds, “Tampoco los indígenas de las Américas parecen ser de una sola raza, a juzgar por su diversidad de tipo, costumbres, lenguaje y grado de cultura a que llegaron por sí mismos” (“neither do the indigenous peoples of the Americas appear to be of one sole race, judging from their diversity of type, customs, language, and level of culture that they achieved by themselves”) (A 68). This acknowledgement of diversity amongst Indigenous peoples and Europeans more broadly goes a long way in dismantling the notion of the mestizo as the ideal type of two races, revealing it as a category of mixture upon mixture. Nonetheless, this observation of mestizaje is still circumscribed within a discourse of mestizaje; Orozco does not abandon the term, but only acknowledges its indeterminacy. In the end, his wavering position about mestizaje reveals more of a frustration with what he views as a hard-lined indigenista position that attempts to fit the indio as indio into the national body politic. In his view for the future of the Americas, “Las razas indígenas no serían otra cosa que un sumado más en el total de razas que forman lo hispánico, en la misma categoría y derecho que cualquiera de ellas” (“the indigenous races would be no more than one more addition to the total mass of races that form the Hispanic, in the same
category and with the same rights as anyone else”) (70). At this point in his writing, Orozco assumes a leftist Westernist position that affirms Indigenous peoples do not need any special treatment by the government. This position does not account for the historical and material realities of Indigenous peoples nor their agency as members of tribal-national, settler-national, and transnational territories. Thus, there is much more at stake in the figure of the “reclining figure.” Through the figure that is at once mixed-race and de-racialized, Orozco posits a settler futurity with no room for Indigenous claims to the future of the continent.

In the end, Orozco was an indigenista in that he exposed the violence and exploitation of Indigenous peoples in his murals and was, in his writing, skeptical of the over-valorization of indigeneity as a basis for a nation-state identity that is, at least in the 1930s, incompatible with Indigenous identity. However, Orozco ever remained the elite artist who propagated a mestizo ideology that devalues Indigenous peoples in the present as cultural agents and political contributors to shape the future of the Americas. His position as a Mexican artist in the U.S. undoubtedly exposed him to the realities of being the mixed-race Other in a land that privileges whiteness. It is reasonable to assume that this experience underpins his continued embrace of mestizaje as a contestation of racialized claims to group identity.

**Conclusion: The Mural as Transindigenous Form**

The mural movements of the 1930s and 1940s capture a moment in the intertwined histories of the U.S. and Mexico. Although post-revolutionary Mexico’s modernizing project was distinct from the United States’ New Deal projects, they share in
the fact that diverse peoples in both countries turned to the Indian Other to create nationalist and American identities. Muralism emerged as an important visual, spatial, and technological practice to create and enforce these identities and to “invent” the histories to back them up. Jennifer McLerran writes that, “The parallels between the Mexican folk art revival of the early twentieth century and U.S. government-funded efforts to revive American Indian arts and crafts in the 1930s and 1940s are not coincidental” (41). The two movements shared key figures such as René D’Harnoncourt and the financial backing of the Rockefeller family, stakeholders who for different reasons saw that Indigenous cultures could form the basis of a shared American identity. The Mexican mural movement would not only influence New Deal Art with WPA mural projects across the country because of its revolutionary themes and role in national consolidation through culture, it would also go on to influence the abstract expressionism of American painters such as Jackson Pollock, and Chicano nationalist art.

While it is recognized that the work of the Mexican muralists directly influenced New Deal art programs, it is not certain if or how they influenced American Indian muralists and artists. This gap in the historic record suggests that Mexican artists did not identify with American Indian artists as they did not identify with Mexico’s Indigenous cultures.

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39 D’Harnoncourt was an Austrian aristocrat who migrated to Mexico. He is credited for reviving indigenous arts and crafts in Mexico, particularly the lacquerware of Olinalá. From 1936-1943, he was appointed the general manager of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board (IACB), a New Deal agency tasked with promoting and safeguarding American Indian arts and crafts. D’Harnoncourt also served as the Director of MOMA from 1949-1967. See McLerran for a detailed analysis of his role in Mexico and the United States.

40 Pollock traveled to Hanover, NH to view Orozco’s mural *The Epic of American Civilization* (see Preface to *Orozco at Dartmouth* 3). He was influenced in particular by the monumentality of the works and Orozco’s and Siquieros’s expressionist style. See Landau’s *Mexican and American Modernism*. 
populations. Moreover, the political and economic realities of the countries lead to important differences between Mexico’s post-revolutionary art movements and New Deal art programs. The first point to understand is that 1930s Mexico would grapple with assimilating its large Indigenous populations under one national identity, whereas American Indians were a relative minority in comparison to the broader U.S. population. Thus, New Deal art did not turn to indigeneity as a basis for a US national identity but rather as an important part of the whole. The second point to understand is that of mobility. As Helen Delpar argues, American artists were inspired by the work of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, to study in Mexico and complete murals in New Deal programs. Although Indigenous peoples have always been mobile, there is no evidence to suggest that American Indian artists traveled to Mexico specifically to study muralism. Nonetheless, American Indian artists would be among those employed in New Deal Programs, and there is evidence to suggest that American Indians were influenced by their own tribal-specific art practices.

That American Indians were also creating modern art, and specifically painting murals, provides a rich and under-examined history to re-contextualize the work of the Mexican muralists. As I conclude this chapter, I want to offer my own coda to elucidate how Indigenous peoples were much more than cultural objects for elite, mestizo artists. This move to understand the Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections in the early twentieth-century mural movement anticipates the focus on Indigenous peoples as

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41 Artists who studied in Mexico include Howard Cook, Marsden Hartley, George Biddle, Caroline Duriex, Pablo O’Higgins, Marion Greenwood, Grace Greenwood, Isamu Nagouchi, Philip Guston, Reuben Kadish. Many of these artists secured commissions to paint murals in Mexico. Artists such as Ben Shahn, Charles Alston, and Hale Woodruff learned fresco techniques while working with Rivera in the U.S. (Delpar 51-54).
cultural producers in the next three chapters. As I will show, American Indian muralists did not have the room to critique the colonial encounter as Orozco had. Yet, muralism was an important site of Indigenous-to-Indigenous contact, creating connections across time and space.

As an ancient Mexican and European art form, muralism in the U.S. and Mexico embodies many of the cultural questions related to race and national identity that circulated and informed the muralists’ social-context. Within the broad landscape of visual media that Mexican, American Indian, and Euro-American artists used, murals—either through fresco or secco techniques—would often do multiple forms of “work”: from enhancing architecture, telling stories, and teaching. Unlike easel painting or the popular poster, frescos are both “an ancient Mexican and European form of mural painting that involves the application of pigment to wet or fresh plaster on walls” (Indych- López, 78). As a pre-Colombian art form, murals have been excavated in the Upper Temple of the Jaguars in Chichen-Itza, Teotihuacán, Monte Albán, and in Hopi kivas. Rivera, unlike Orozco, had traveled to Chichen-Itza to view these murals (Coffey, TMP, 209). As an Indigenous form, muralism is akin to pre-historic murals, rock art, and hide paintings, as it transforms its surrounding lived environment, connecting land, built space, and people. In the early twentieth-century, anthropologists uncovered pre-historic murals in their excavations of Frijoles Canyon in New Mexico (McLerran 52). Alfredo Montoya, Crescencio Martinez, and Julian Martinez (San Ildefonso Pueblo) were laborers on the dig; their contact with the pre-historic murals influenced their own artistic formation (McLerran 52). In this way, San Ildefonso Pueblo muralists were connecting to
past traditions, forging Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections across time by creating Indigenous afterlives for the form.

In the 1930s and 1940s, murals worked as native hubs\textsuperscript{42} through which contemporary Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections were created. One of the impacts that \textit{The Problem of Indian Administration} (commonly known as the Meriam Report) had on Indian policy in the inter-war period was its condemnation of boarding schools and suggestion to promote Indigenous arts.\textsuperscript{43} New Deal funding helped to create day and boarding schools into centers of art education. Schools would function to teach native students about their own art forms— with the nation-state as mediator. Native students, albeit through the patronage of non-native peoples, learned about tribal-specific art practices and represented their tribal-specific cultures with traditional techniques. The Santa Fe Indian School sought to encourage students to represent the traditions and ceremonies of their own nations. Dorothy Dunn, an educator and art teacher, led the Studio, the Santa Fe Indian School’s art program from 1932-1937. Under Dunn’s leadership, the Studio had a curriculum that ranged from “native design, drawing, painting, and lettering” to give students a foundation in native art forms and to work from their own experience, but it prohibited students from incorporating European techniques such as perspective, and light and shade as well as from using tribal designs other than from the student’s tribal nation (McGeough 37-38). Students in the Studio represented daily customs, sacred ceremonies, and stylized non-human life forms if tribal customs

\textsuperscript{42} Term coined by Renya K. Ramirez describing community making practices amongst American Indians living off reservations.
\textsuperscript{43} The Meriam Report was a government study of American Indian affairs published in 1928 with the aim of reforming U.S. Indian policy. See Prucha and McLerran.
prohibited the representation of human forms. With funding from The Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) beginning in 1934, native artists such as Tonita Peña and Agapina Quintana were given studio space to create art for the Indian Service buildings under construction (McGeough 33). Students such as Pablita Velarde were strongly influenced by the presence of these native female artists: “[Peña] gave me the inner strength that I needed to dare the men to put me in my place or let me go” (Velarde qtd. in McGeough 33). Many students of the Santa Fe Indian School such as Pablita Velarde would go on to become renowned artists who later chose to remain traditionalists.

The dining hall murals at the Santa Fe Indian School exemplify muralism’s role in creating contemporary Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections. The Santa Fe Indian School commissioned Olive Rush to instruct and support native students with the school’s dining hall murals.44 The efforts by students and adults represent a transindigenous encounter, with San Ildefonso Pueblo, Kiowa, Hopi, Zuni, and Diné participants.45 Among the adult participants was Julian Martinez who was one of the three San Ildefonso Pueblo laborers in the Frijoles Canyon Excavation. Under Dunn’s tenure, Hopi students also painted a physics mural. McGeough writes, “The physics mural, as Dunn explained, was a graphic representation in Hopi Indian designs of storm, ...

44 Rush was well known in the Santa Fe community because she had been experimenting with frescos when she moved to New Mexico in 1920. She would later be commissioned to paint murals for the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), and the Federal Art Project (FAP) through the Works Projects Administration (WPA).

45 McGeough includes names of participants and for brevity within the paragraph I include their names here: The adult participants include: Julian Martinez, Richard Martinez, Abel Sanchez, and Romando Vigil of San Ildefonso Pueblo and Jack Hokeah (Kiowa). Students include: Juan Diego Martinez and Miguel Martinez of San Ildefonso Pueblo, Riley Quoyavema (Hopi), Tom Weahkee (Zuni), and Navajo/Diné students Albert Hardy, Edward Lee, Alex Lee, and Paul Tsosie. See McGeough 34.
wind, rain, cloud, rainbow, and lightening, illustrating that “all life is controlled by the elements of Weather and Climate” (37). Although the murals at the Santa Fe Indian School have since been destroyed, these two murals function similarly to Orozco’s work at Dartmouth as sites of storytelling and learning.

Outside of the day and boarding-school contexts, New Deal funding led to the commission of murals in key governmental settings including post offices, the U.S. Department of the Interior, the U.S. Department of Treasury, and the Navajo Nation’s Council House. From 1934-1943, the U.S Treasury Department commissioned 1600 murals by native and non-native artists to document American history in U.S post offices. A descendent of tipi artists, Stephen Mopope is perhaps the best known muralist of the era (Noah). Of the Kiowa Five, he was commissioned in 1936 to paint sixteen murals in the Anandarko, Oklahoma Post Office, with other Kiowa Five members James Auchiah and Spenser Asah (Noah). Mopope also painted the mural “Ceremonial Dance” in the Department of the Interior in Washington D.C. in 1939. Velino Shije Herrera, Allan Houser, and Gerald Nailor (graduates of the Santa Fe Indian School) and James Auchiah and Woody Crumbo were also selected to paint murals in the Department of the Interior in Washington D.C. (McGeough 33 and McLerran 176). Gerald Nailor’s mural cycle entitled The History and Progress of the Navajo People was completed in 1943; it is a set of eight murals in the Navajo Nation’s Council House.47

46 See McLerran for a detailed examination of the murals in the Department of the Interior.
47 Donald L. Parman writes briefly of Nailor’s work in his book The Navajos and the New Deal. He focuses on the design of the Council House, which is circular, and built of native stone. He writes, “It was obviously intended to harmonize with the tribal culture and desert landscape and to foster tribal unity” (Parman 97). The Public Works
Although a testament to the many native artists working in the era, these murals also highlight the asymmetrical power relations between native muralists and government patrons. Unlike Orozco’s work in the U.S. which was funded through private institutions and philanthropists like the Rockefeller family, American Indian muralists received their commissions through New Deal sources of funding such as the Indian Division of Public Works of Art Project and the Treasury Section of Fine Arts. Funding sources, institutional settings, and racial politics played major roles in the muralists’ inability to represent colonial encounter(s). New Deal Indian art, McLerran argues, “glossed over historically complex interactions and relations of power between native and nonnative peoples, erasing traces of the colonial encounter” (McLerran 19). Juxtaposing Nailor’s murals at Window Rock with Orozco’s at Dartmouth exemplifies this elision. Whereas both muralists begin with pre-contact themes, Nailor’s mural represents the colonial encounter (white encroachment and forced removal) with a much lighter palette; excluding bows and arrows, there are no representations of modern weaponry. Nailor further narrativizes Navajo/Diné and Americans coming together to sign a peace treaty and prospering agriculturally. Like Orozco’s reference to the modern man and education, Nailor completes his cycle with a young man and woman holding diplomas. McLerran writes that Nailor’s mural, “In Navajo eyes… represent an argument for support of highly unpopular New Deal federal policy and a glossing over of the turmoil surrounding its institution” (15).

Administration provided funding for the Navajo Nation’s headquarters in Window Rock (McLerran 7).

McLerran’s book includes images of the mural from which I base my summary and analysis.
McLerran’s intervention into American Indian New Deal art offers an important starting point to understand North-South geopolitical differences in representing colonialism. For example, the virtual exhibition “Indians at the Post Office: Native Themes in New Deal Art” begins the process of examining the 400 “Indian themed” murals located throughout the nation. In the introduction to the virtual exhibit, Jorge Barreiro reviews the murals by four native artists: Andrew Standing Bear (Oglala Lakota), Stephen Mopope (Kiowa), W. Richard (Dick) West (Southern Cheyenne), and Solomon McCombs (Creek). Their murals, as Barreiro writes, depart from the often imagined and violent representations by Euro-American artists to look at themes of quotidian life, performance, and self-determination. Like the mestizo muralists, Euro-American muralists represented the colonial encounter. However, American Indian muralists were prohibited from representing Indigenous-white relations. Unlike Orozco, American Indian muralists may have been in the position to represent their present moments and imagine Indigenous futurities within or alongside the nation-state (such as Nailor’s Navajo/Diné graduates) had they been granted the same freedom of expression Orozco had as a modern artist. If the past is the only sanctioned content in these government buildings, it nonetheless is filtered because the colonial encounter remains obscured, and the possibility of Indigenous futurities foreclosed.

As we see in Orozco’s *The Epic of American Civilization*, he could contemplate ongoing violence and critique the nation-state. His anti-colonialist politics enabled a transnational critique of colonial violence in the Americas. Anreus, Linden, and Weinberg extend the aesthetic and ideological reach of the Mexican mural movement across the Americas, proposing the modern fresco as a Pan-American cultural form. At
once in the service of cultural nationalist and internationalist projects, the Mexican mural movement represents how non-native artists reflected upon the social, political, and economic changes of the 1930s throughout the Americas that also affected Indigenous communities interpolated as inside and yet outside the nation-state. In this way, transindigeneity was produced through and against national and international politics and culture, but it remained a transindigeneity of the mestizo.

American Indian muralists offer a counterpoint to the indigeniety represented by “Los Tres Grandes.” Although the link between Mexican muralists and artists from the Santa Fe Indian School or the Kiowa Five is unclear with regards to specific contact, this juxtaposition highlights one point of contention: non-native artists, tourists, government agents, and philanthropists dictated the limits of American Indian’s experimentation with modernist techniques and content. Evidence suggests that American Indians during the 1930s were encouraged to be cultural producers as long as they produced traditional art or themes. In this sense, the freedom to produce modern art and to critique colonialism and nation-state neocolonialism as Orozco had at Dartmouth was a privilege underpinned by citizenship, race, and gender constructions. As an indigenista text, *The Epic of American Civilization*, foregrounds multiple and ongoing colonial encounters but if we are to attribute an Indigenous afterlife to it, it would begin with honoring and affirming Indigenous peoples’ agency to shape their own futurities.
I ended the previous chapter with an overview of American Indian muralism and drew attention to how Orozco, the modern mestizo painter, could express the violence of the colonial encounter in a way that American Indian muralists, such as Gerald Nailor, could not. Through an examination of Todd Downing’s *The Mexican Earth*, this chapter engages a dialogue with the themes of Mexican historiography, indigeneity, and travel. Published in 1940, *The Mexican Earth* is uniquely positioned as a history of Mexico written and narrated from the perspective of an American Indian traveler. The text begins with its present moment, the late 1930s, and overviews key moments of the country’s pre-Columbian, colonial, and nation-building history. Satirical, optimistic, and registering a deep knowledge of Mexican literature and literature about Mexico, the text is firmly rooted in the transnational politics of the 1930s. That the late 1930s was also a time of great promise for improving social conditions for Indigenous Mexicans and mestizos was not lost on the Choctaw writer who, as James H. Cox identifies, was keenly interested in Indigenous Mexico.

Downing was an accomplished writer and intellectual. His biography highlights a sustained interest in the history and literature of Mexico, particularly Indigenous Mexico. He was born in Atoka, in the Choctaw Nation (Indian Territory) in 1902. Downing studied Latin American literature and history and earned B.A. and M.A. degrees while at the University of Oklahoma at Norman. After his studies, he worked in the Department of Modern Languages as a Spanish instructor and reviewed books in Spanish, Italian, and
French for *Books Abroad*, later renamed *World Literature Today*. During the summer months of the late 1920s and early 1930s, Downing served as a tour guide in Mexico. The experience and observations he gained while in Mexico inform his crime fiction and *The Mexican Earth*. As Cox notes, Downing was deeply moved by the murder of two Mexican college students in Armore, Oklahoma in 1931. Following this local act of police violence, he published his first detective novel *Murder on Tour*. In his crime fiction, which does not feature Indigenous narrators, Downing would specialize in organized crime and murder in Mexico. This interest, as Cox argues, was part of his project to demystify Indigenous and Mexican criminality and expose neocolonial violence.\(^49\) Downing worked as a professional writer in New York and Philadelphia during the 1930s and 1940s. Abandoning his literary pursuits, he eventually returned to Atoka. Significantly, Downing’s last publication, *Chahta Anompa*, was a Choctaw language course and contributed to Choctaw language revitalization and self-determination efforts.\(^50\)

Largely overlooked because of his crime fiction, and because he does not deal overtly with American Indian themes, Downing has not received much critical attention. *The Mexican Earth* was republished in 1996 after nearly sixty years from its initial publication. Cox has been the most significant contributor to recovering and interpreting Downing’s work, and he does so within a tradition of American Indian Literary Nationalism. As I summarized in the introduction, Cox connects Downing and other

\(^{49}\) See Cox, “Mexican Indigenismo, Choctaw Self-Determination, and Todd Downing’s Detective Novels.” Cox also elaborates on this argument in his book *The Red Land to the South*.

\(^{50}\) This was first published as a serial according to Hochbruck, but it was published in book form in 1971.
American Indian writers of the time through their focus on Mexico, particularly their affinity for Indigenous Mexico. Building upon Cox’s important work, this chapter asks: In what ways does Downing’s Indigenous identity and worldview inform his reading of Mexican history? What does Downing’s work have to teach us about the possibilities and limits of North-South literary and theoretical interactions? This chapter thus deepens the dissertation’s North-South methodology by examining how Downing mixes history writing and travel writing, drawing from Spanish-language and English-language sources. I argue that the text posits a form of intellectual mediation, mediating between English-language and Spanish-language literary traditions on the one hand, and a living Indigenous Mexican history, a “méxico profundo” to use Bonfil Batalla’s term, on the other hand.51 Through the self-conscious fashioning of an American Indian narrator, Downing works through an inherited and mediated literary history of Mexico by undercutting it with immediate firsthand knowledge based on the narrator’s travels and translocal52 positionality. As a traveling history, The Mexican Earth thus registers an alternative narrative of Mexican history as an Indigenous Mexican history and retains enduring relevance in its anticipation of a comparative, transindigenous, turn in scholarship of the Americas.

51 I use this term in a metaphorical and literal sense. Downing draws attention to the same doubling. He writes: “literally – Tenochtitlan has kept coming up out of the ground. The National Museum is crammed with its fragments. The digging of a well or a laying of a sewer in Mexico City always resembled the excavation of archeologists” (91).
52 I draw this term from Álvarez who uses it to describe the multiplicity of subject positions that Latina/s move through; it is a subject position that emphasizes movement across locations and the embodied and epistemological work of translation to keep up.
Intellectual Mediation

*The Mexican Earth* foregrounds the perspective of an Indigenous narrator from the North. Informed by the author’s biography, the text enacts intellectual mediation, through which the author draws from multiple cultural traditions to weave together an argument that is at once anti-colonial and about Indigenous resistance. As we saw in the work of the Mexican muralists, modern artists in Mexico generally had anti-colonial politics that were aligned with nationalist aims. In this configuration, the figure of Indigenous resistance is upheld only to assimilate it into official history; we see this process in Darío and through Orozco’s critique of the indo-proletarian figure. In this sense, Downing’s text does similar work; he writes a history about Mexico that makes Indigenous peoples and their histories central to the formation of the contemporary nation-state; it is assimilatory. As we will see, this assimilation is a response to his optimism about the political changes he sees during the Cardenas regime (1934-1940). However, Downing’s work does not assimilate this resistance into a trope of mestizaje. As he travels through Mexico and its land, Downing actively asserts a continued living presence in the nation-state. *The Mexican Earth* is transmotion, it offers a storied Native presence - and a transindigenous modernism.

I turn to James Ruppert’s notion of mediation by way of Cox who finds its term a starting point to discuss his focus on literary diplomacy. Ruppert defines mediation as a flexible “artistic and conceptual standpoint…which uses the epistemological frameworks of Native American and Western cultural traditions to illuminate each other” which he applies to contemporary writers such as N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, and Gerald Vizenor (4). By intervening with the term, Ruppert was writing
against a tradition that conceived of Native writers as victims caught in a cultural bind who were required to privilege one tradition over another. In this move, Ruppert recasts the Native writer as a skilled mediator who can resolve tensions between traditions (by way of their affinity to modernist and postmodernist techniques). Their mediational texts, he argues, weave together distinct ways of knowing, such as myth and psychology or oral storytelling and novelistic techniques to tell their stories. In addition to its aesthetic approach, the mediational text has a specific social function. Ruppert writes, “the mediational text endeavors to move readers implied by the text to question the way they form knowledge and meaning, but in the end it seeks to re-educate those readers so that they can understand two codes, two traditions of discourse” (11). The Native writer, as Ruppert explains, imagines an audience of Native and non-Native readers who can learn from and be moved by the other’s culture; through the text, all are illuminated.

Ruppert’s work does much to make the Native writer more than a translator or spokesperson for their Native culture, but there are limits to its application to The Mexican Earth. Because he glosses over the possibility that the Native writer may be mediating between more than two epistemological frameworks, it is reasonable to assume that the sweeping categories of “Western” and “Native American” require further scrutiny and specificity. Reading Downing’s work as a mediational text in Ruppert’s sense of the term would focus on the author’s bicultural heritage as Choctaw and American, with American as a stand-in term for Western culture. How would his intervention into Spanish-language, Mexicanist history fit into this formulation? Ruppert’s theory thus overlooks the power of citizenship and the power of the nation-state in shaping one’s cultural and legal identity. A mediational approach, in Ruppert’s
sense of the term, does not have the theoretical flexibility to disentangle the term “American” from its multiple historical, legal, political, and cultural meanings that go into making an American Indian, an American from the U.S. and an American from Mexico. This North-South focus was undoubtedly outside the scope of Ruppert’s book, but it reveals a gap in how bicultural heritage is made ever more complex when we account for citizenship. For example, American Indians were not granted citizenship until the Indian Citizenship Act. Signed on June 2, 1924. It reads: “Be it enacted . . . .That all non-citizen Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States be, and they are hereby, declared to be citizens of the United States” (Prucha 218). Previously to this Act, citizenship was granted in a piecemeal fashion through negotiations for allotment, marriages, and military service.53 In contrast, Indigenous Mexicans obtained citizenship nearly a hundred years earlier with the formation of the nation-state and its transformation into a liberal democracy.54

In the second place, Ruppert’s focus on contemporary Native American fiction does not necessarily align with a robust body of nonfiction for the period in which Downing writes. While Cox values Ruppert’s mediational methodology and theory, he chooses to focus on diplomacy as an important aspect of American Indian’s political work in addition to its explanatory power as a literary trope. Observing a tradition of non-fiction writing, Cox identifies the era from 1920-1960 as a period of American Indian diplomacy in literature and politics, characterized by an emphasis on representing

53 See Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, in which he link sovereignty, transmotion, and survivance.
54 What citizenship meant “on the ground” however was a way of wrestling political autonomy away from Indigenous pueblos.
American Indians and on establishing good relations within and across multiple political arenas. Cox argues that *The Mexican Earth* partakes in this tradition of diplomacy; vis-à-vis the text, Downing fashions himself as a self-made diplomat.

In contrast to Ruppert’s use of mediation, and Cox’s deviation from it, I use the term “intellectual mediation,” because I find that the term “mediation” is useful in the way that it draws attention to competing interests and to the figure of a mediator who is presumably neutral. My term is similar to Frederic Jameson’s definition of mediation as a form of establishing relations. He writes that mediation is, “the relationship between the levels or instances, and the possibility of adapting analyses and findings from one level to another” (24). I contend that mediation is relevant to the text, but I bring the focus to Downing’s mediation as an intellectual, research and practice-driven approach to the history of Mexico. When we consider the text as an intellectual project, informed by multiple sources across genres in English and Spanish, we gain a deeper appreciation for Downing’s intervention. I ask: to whom and for whom is Downing writing? Who is Downing’s implied reader? His ideal reader? This consideration retains the text’s political effects, but focuses on the narrator (and author) as a mediator between diverse intellectual cultures. When applied to *The Mexican Earth*, intellectual mediation articulates a way of establishing relations between artistic, conceptual, and intellectual standpoints drawn from Native, American, and Mexican cultural traditions.

To make my case, I want to foreground the traveling narrator. In this sense, intellectual mediation builds upon Ruppert’s definition by shifting focus away from the author’s cultural heritage to the author’s intellectual environment and the geography of his journey. Cox dismisses the importance of the travelogue. He writes that it is, “a
history of indigenous Mexico thinly veiled as a travelogue” (109). But it is through the
figure of the tour guide that mediation comes through. To mediate can mean “to
intervene” and “to intercede;” this latter meaning suggests that at least one party does
not share the same power as the competing stakeholder, and neither does the mediator.
Likewise, the noun form “mediation” can mean “intercession on behalf of another.” With its connection to medium and media, mediation implies a host of cultural values,
norms, and experiences that shape the way we see the world. As we will see, the tour
guide as historian, the American Indian from the North, works across and between these
different meanings of the term.

If mediation can mean to intercede and to intervene, when has one intervened too
much? How are interventions framed, by whom, and why? Mediation seizes to work if it
is a matter of taking without giving back (appropriation), and imposing imported
theoretical frameworks and cultural assumptions to other contexts (application). Orozco
brings attention to this dilemma in his autobiography. In chapter one, I drew from
Orozco’s visual history and autobiography to elucidate a specific, modern bind: how the
contradiction between an anti-colonial and nationalist politics in Mexico was smoothed
over by making a mestizo of the “indio.” Orozco’s mural, *The Epic of American
Civilization* registers an anti-colonial critique of Mexican nationalism. However, as he
openly critiqued the paternalism underlying indigenismo, he affirmed mestizaje. By
embracing a mestizo identity in his work, Orozco sought to articulate a vision of the

55 From the Oxford English Dictionary.
56 Ibid.
future that somehow could transcend the pervading de facto colonial race-relations. His autobiography lends support to his aesthetic project:

Toda la historia de México parece estar escrita exclusivamente desde el punto de vista racial. La discusión se reduce, en apariencia, a proclamar e imponer la superioridad de una de las dos razas, y lo peor es que no es una discusión doméstica, porque plumas extranjeras han intervenido y siguen interviendo en la confección de nuestra historia, con muy aviesos fines. El trabajo de nuestros historiadores parece un encuentro de pugilistas entre indianistas e hispanistas, siendo el referee extranjero (The history of Mexico seems to be written exclusively from a racial point of view. It seems that the discussion is reduced to proclaiming and imposing the superiority of one of two races, and what’s worst is that this is not solely a domestic discussion because foreign pens have intervened and continue to intervene with terrible consequences in the making of our history. The work of our historians seems to be a meeting of pugilists between indianists and hispanists, with the foreigner being referee). (emphasis his 68)

Orozco’s passage brings an additional bind to the notion of intellectual mediation. If history writing is not separate from nation-building, what role does the “foreign” mediator play? Although The Epic of American Civilization was completed in the U.S., we see how his artistic and intellectual formation as a Mexican informs his presentation of Mexican and continental history. What perspective from the North might Downing bring to his reading of Mexican history? And what might his “reading” of Mexico have to say about American Indian –U.S. relations? As we will see, creating a national history was part and parcel of creating a sense of unity between diverse people and to “invent” a long-tenure on the land. Imported interpretations from those outside of this process of myth-making could undermine that project. How would Orozco read The Mexican Earth?

While Downing’s text gives us a glimpse into what an Indigenous writer of the North has to say about Mexico, it is difficult to brush it aside as an example of foreign intervention in Mexican historiography. Angela Wilson Cavender offers insight into this
discussion. In her critique of the field of American Indian history in the late 1990s, she admonishes the field for ignoring oral traditions, tribal and family historians and for privileging what is a written body of work from white male perspectives. She calls this kind of history, “non-indian perceptions of American Indian history.” She argues that direct engagement with tribal communities can validate their perspectives and more aptly reflect American Indian history. When applied to *The Mexican Earth*, we see that Downing draws from both Spanish-language and English-language sources for his research materials. Even more so, *The Mexican Earth* was published in English by Doubleday, Doran, and Co. so whose Indigenous history is being served by his intervention? Because Downing works through non-native sources in English and Spanish, the narrator’s travel anecdotes become Downing’s way to read against the grain and validate Indigenous presences and perspectives. As we will see from the textual evidence presented in the following sections, Downing writes with a sense of skepticism and satire that comes from the narrator’s firsthand interactions, observations, and from his experience as an American Indian. The narrator measures texts against each other and against his own experience in the U.S. and Mexico. Like the mediator with a particular social task, Downing’s narrator is much more than a translator in the narrowest sense of the term as someone equipped with the linguistic skills to convey information from one language into another. The narrator as mediator is pushing intellectual and literary traditions in two languages with the task of illuminating these non-native writers about Indigenous Mexico.

For example, Downing quotes a translated poem originally written by the Texcocoan, pre-Columbian poet Nezahualcoyotl and offers a brief commentary of the
translation. His literary criticism is brief but manages to illuminate his mediational method. Structurally, Downing splices his commentary amidst a larger chapter about the rise of Mesoamerican civilizations. His description of the origins and uses of corn sets off the move to poetry. Noting that “most visitors from the United States” have yet to develop a taste for the tortilla, he offers a beautifully rendered description of the tortilla: “It is not the taste of the corn alone, but also that of the lime which impregnates it. The stone of the metate on which the nixtamal was ground adds something, as does the clay of the comal on which it was baked, the smoke of wood or charcoal” (Downing 25).

Although Downing italicizes all Spanish-language terms throughout the text, the use of italics in this passage is two-fold. First, the Spanish-language words enhance the detailed, sensory experience to give the reader a sense of the narrator’s authority on the topic. The reader knows that the narrator must have actual experience eating a tortilla and knowledge of the tortilla making process. In this instance, the detail signifies his pleasure in the food and thus differentiates the narrator from “most visitors” on this issue. Second, these italics are of Spanish-language terms with Náhuatl origins (métatl, nextamalli, comalli). Downing expects his erudite reader to connect tortillas, a staple of the Mexican diet (and cuisine), to its Indigenous origins.

As an aside, Downing moves from the tortilla to its representation in literature. He first introduces the poem, with his commentary: “Tortillas are the “bread” of the early Mexican poet…” (25).

\[Oh, \ my \ mother, \ when \ I \ die \nBury \ me \ beneath \ your \ hearth.\]

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57 Nixtamal is the “dough” a mixture of corn, lime, and water that is ground in a stone bowl and later cooked.
When you go to make the bread
There is where you’ll cry for me. (emphasis mine 25)

Downing carefully establishes his narrator’s authority before offering his brief criticism of the translation. Downing does not explicitly comment on the merit of Cornyn’s translation. What he does do is suggest that the translator’s metrical decision does not adequately reflect Nezahualcoyotl’s meaning. Bread is literally and symbolically quite distinct from tortillas and reflects Cornyn’s not Nezahualcoyotl’s reality. Through this small act of literary criticism, Downing mediates between the translation and the “original” text. In this example, Downing’s knowledge of Indigenous and Mexican practices contributes to his ability to illuminate the text and his reader. His move is an important revisionist one that gives priority to establishing historical particulars. If we assume that Downing’s implied reader is monolingual with an interest in Mexico we can still appreciate this example of mediation as a corrective strategy. The reader need only know that bread is not the same as tortillas to understand his criticism of the translation.

In a sense, Downing is his own ideal reader. Downing’s work reveals a pulsating sense that a history of Indigenous Mexico ought to be shared. But he is faced with a practical question: how to share a history when people speak different languages? Theoretically, Downing faces the problem that language reflects geopolitical hierarchies. When we consider Downing’s use of English-language and Spanish-language sources, we can imagine that his ideal reader is bilingual in both languages. However, the ideal reader does not necessarily correspond to the implied reader. The multi-lingual Downing writes in English for an English-speaking audience. Following Ruppert’s notion that the mediational text serves a social function, we could assume that Downing’s implied
English-speaking reader needs an education in how to read Indigenous Mexico. Crucially, Mexican intellectuals were engaging similar questions about Indigenous Mexico, and Downing’s perspective could have contributed an enriching point of view.

As an English-language text, the text would not necessarily reach this implied Spanish-speaking audience. Moreover, most Indigenous Mexicans as a potential group of implied readers would be left out because of language. In this sense, *The Mexican Earth* offers an important Indigenous perspective of Mexican historiography, but as a cultural production by an American Indian from the North, it more closely participates in an Anglo-American and Anglo-European tradition of writing about Mexico. Thus, Downing writes alongside a Mexican intellectual circle to an American intellectual circle and in the process makes an Indigenous Mexican presence felt in its bilingual representation and historical subject matter.

As the tortilla passage demonstrates, Indigenous languages also enter the frame of Downing’s mediational approach. Nonfiction in an Indigenous language would have even less of an audience, particularly because *The Mexican Earth* is not about any one specific oral tradition. Downing constructs an indigeneity based in a shared history rather than in a shared language, an approach that widens its reach to include multiple tribal nations. In the essay, “Indigenous Nationhood and Intertribal Kinship in Todd Downing’s *The Mexican Earth,*” Cox interprets the text as positing a two-fold claim: in the first place, the texts maps an “indigenous nation to indigenous nation relationship within Mexico and between Mexico and the United States” (75). Through this transindigenous mapping, Downing insists on maintaining tribal specificity when interpreting history at the same time that he posits a sense of intertribal kinship based on the land. In other words, Mexico
for Downing was “an extended homeland” (I 86). Two pieces of evidence strengthen Cox’s argument. On the one hand, he draws from research that examines shared traditions in art and architecture depicting winged serpents and origin stories between Mesoamerican and Mississippian peoples. This history establishes a historical basis for kinship. On the other hand, Cox draws from one of Downing’s earlier writings: “A Choctaw’s Autobiography,” which he wrote while in graduate school. In this brief essay, Downing insists on his Choctaw identity, while laying out the political utility of an Indian identity (i.e. a unifying identity to keep the U.S. government accountable). Cox explains that, “Downing saw these identifications, Choctaw and Indian, as mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory” (I 87). Cox interprets the essay as setting the theoretical and political frame he would later develop in The Mexican Earth: it is a document that asserts Indigenous nationhood and intertribal kinship. “A Choctaw’s Autobiography” lays out the groundwork for extending indigeneity across tribal and nation-state borders.

In describing The Mexican Earth as a text about intellectual mediation, I suggest that Downing constructs an Indigenous narrator who can intervene in an established conversation about the history of Mexico- one that was occurring on both sides of the border as well as in Europe. Each language posits its own community of thinkers and readers, but the linguistic and geopolitical borders did not prevent Downing from taking that first step on the other side. As we will see in the next section, Downing is writing during the height of the indigenista movement in Mexico. This historical moment was shaping how Mexicans valorized the country’s pre-Columbian past and sought to include

58 Quetzalcoatl is a key figure in the text.
Indigenous Mexicans in its modernization efforts. Downing sees through the indigenista rhetoric in both languages and writes to fill in its gaps.

**Indigenous Travel Writing: Along the Pan-American Highway**

While Downing may see an extended homeland in Mexico, as Cox argues, it is clear that the narrator is not at home. Through crafting an American Indian narrator as traveler (a translocal), Downing asserts the narrator’s *foreignness* even as he posits a shared sense of indianness. Through mixing history and travel writing, Downing works within and challenges a genre of travel writing by Anglo-American and Anglo-European writers in Mexico. He is at once explicit about this move through a system of direct reference and citation, but Downing also mocks the tradition by putting the foreign traveler under the author’s Native gaze.

As we see more closely in chapter four, James Clifford sets out to recover the category of travel from its colonialist legacy in the nineteenth century, Anglo-European traveler. Sixty years before Clifford gave his now famous paper, Downing set out on his own revisionist project. When we examine Downing’s sources, we see that he was widely read in a growing body of anthropological research on Mexico by American writers Frederick Starr, Robert Redfield, and Frances Toor as well as in the journalistic fieldwork of John Reed. Although Downing pokes fun at the field and the amateur anthropologist, it is a growing body of travel writing (fiction and non-fiction) by Anglo-European writers that most interests the detective writer-turn-traveling historian. Drawing from Mrs Alec Tweedie’s *Mexico as I Saw It*, Aldous Huxley’s *Beyond the Mexique Bay*, and D.H. Lawrence’s novel *The Plumed Serpent* (all English writers), Downing seems set to write
back to an often condescending tradition of white, European travel writers. From Cortez, von Humboldt, Tweedie, and Huxley, Downing’s move to posit an Indigenous view further posits an “American” view of Mexico. As a Choctaw writer and an American Indian, Downing configures the Indigenous, traveling narrator to re-inscribe a Pan-American perspective prior to the nation-state and rooted in a continental, anti-colonialist understanding of American identity.

Downing begins at the border, and like Aldous Huxley’s *Beyond the Mexique Bay*, Downing begins with irony and wit. The text begins with the narrator crossing the border into Mexico via Laredo and meditating on the applicability of the phrase “el primer paso al otro lado” (“the first step on the other side”) to name a bar. By pointing out the irony of bar names, Downing is really pointing out the reality of the border; his narrator crosses in a car, interacting with immigration officers on both sides; he moves between two jurisdictions. The literal and figurative first step into either side is movement across and within a legal and political apparatus that works to obfuscate Indigenous kinship and citizenship. The first step on either side is, in this legal sense, the same. At the same time, Downing’s meditation on the term is ironic as he renders a particular form of modern transport into Mexico. The narrator is *driving* into Mexico through Texas; there is simply no first “step” into Mexico. Unlike his literary predecessor, Tweedie traveled into Mexico in 1900, first traveling through Texas and continuing the journey by train, particularly in private cars. Huxley began his trip by ocean stream liner, first stopping in the Caribbean and traveling into Mexico by way of

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59 Huxley travels to the Americas aboard an ocean stream liner and begins his book by humorously attacking the industry’s advertisement strategies.
Central America; his journey was a mix of ship, train, and burro rides. These three travelers employ modern modes of transportation (burro aside), but whereas Tweedie praised the English-owned railway lines, Downing frames his narrative along the Pan-American Highway; the first step on the other side resonating with a shared sense of geography and nomenclature heightened by the vehicle and the construction of good roads.

From the outset, Downing works to demystify notions of Mexican criminality. Working through the border traffic into Mexico, the narrator overhears a conversation between U.S. immigration officers about a recent shooting in Mexico between the police and federal police over jurisdiction (precisely the issue his American Indian traveler foregrounds with his drive into Mexico). The narrator apologizes for recounting the story, but the story works to demystify Mexican criminality. He writes, “Now as one who has criticized press and motion pictures in the United States for giving a wild-West touch to things Mexican, let me say that I cite this incident because it is unusual and, I think, too good to pass up” (2). The narrator describes that while Mexico was dangerous during the Revolutionary war (1910-1920), it was no longer the case. Contesting Mexican criminality at the outset, he writes: “One has to dodge no more bullets on the Mexican side of the international bridge than on ours” (3). While the narrator specifically calls out the motion picture industry, this example offers a powerful counterpoint to both Tweedie’s and Huxley’s account of Mexico. Throughout the portions of the text wherein Huxley travels through Mexico, he repeats the idea that the Indigenous peoples (the natives) save the little money they have to buy guns for their endless feuds and vendettas. During her first night in Mexico, incidentally on a ranch in northern Mexico, Tweedie
fears the Indigenous peasants rising with guns and machetes; reference to “villainous faces” and criminality abound throughout the tome. One can only surmise Downing’s reaction to these representations of Indigenous Mexicans as particularly violent. These first few pages of The Mexican Earth confirm the narrator’s outsider position as a U.S. citizen traveling south, but it also reveals his insider knowledge of the nation-state. It is clear that he has traveled before and will not consume the story as evidence of either a dangerous or a romantic country.

Travel, as in other chapters of this dissertation, is an important part of the author’s biography as well as an important trope and epistemological tool. In The Mexican Earth, the narrator (like the author) is well-traveled in Mexico, and the Pan-American Highway functions as a device to narrate Mexican history. That Downing uses the highway to create connections across time and space is significant and reflects the optimism of the late 1930s. For Huxley, writing in the early part of the decade, the Pan-American Highway was only a naïve idea. On the road from Oaxaca City to Etla, Huxley writes: “The road was a section of that hypothetical Pan-American Highway which is, some day, to link New York with Lima, or, more modestly, with Panama, or yet more modestly, with Guatemala City” (284). Huxley mocks the idea of a vast highway system and figuratively shrinks the idea down to size. Downing’s narrator, on the other hand, is a motorist enjoying the road. As he travels on the Pan-American Highway, he dwells on what he observes and on what he has read.

While driving from Nuevo Laredo to Monterrey, for example, he works through the various metaphors that have been used to describe the map of Mexico. He begins, “people are always disagreeing about Mexico so they disagree on what the country looks
like” (4). Animal, leg of mutton, cornucopia, boot, “sombrero dented at the crown,” the narrator calls attention to the fraught (and often humorous) processes of observation and interpretation. The narrator agrees that Mexico is like a mountain, a metaphor that allows him to call upon an Indigenous interpretation: “A Mexican pyramid is an imitation of a mountain, a mountain made symmetrical” (5). Here, the narrator references the Pyramid of the Sun in the Valley of Mexico, a human-made “mountain” constructed by Indigenous peoples thousands of years ago. The narrator intervenes in the discussion, weighing in on the side of Indigenous labor and the land. The figurative statement that Mexico looks like a mountain posits an epistemological truth: We know what Mexico looks like when we examine the labor and land that make it so.

The reference to Mexico looking like a mountain gains added significance when juxtaposed against Huxley’s observation of Mayan pyramids. In one of the several chapters entitled “Quiriga” (in Guatemala), Huxley elaborates on the difference between Hindu and Mayan art: the latter’s art being completely devoid of sensuality. Huxley writes: “As for the Maya architecture – its style is all that is most un-Indian, most abstractly inorganic. An affair of pyramids, of flat walls divided up into rectangular parts, of wide and regular flights of steps, it is an embodiment of man’s most distinctively human, his most anti-natural imaginings” (50). Huxley’s description of Mayan architecture echoes why it would have a strong influence on modern architecture. It is geometric and free of ornamentation – an example of form and function to draw on a principle of Bauhaus design. But to Huxley, this architecture is decidedly “un-Indian” because it resembles an anti-natural aesthetic (the “natural” most probably referring to primitive). Of course, Downing’s specific reference was to Toltec architecture. We can
assume that Downing would not collapse differences in Mayan and Toltec architecture, but would in all likelihood point out their symmetrical similarities as evidence of influence and contact. As a response to reading Huxley, Downing affirms “Mexican” pyramids as decidedly “Indian” and “natural.”

Along the journey, the narrator traces a similar path that Indigenous peoples from the North would have taken. His route on the Pan-American Highway compresses time as it connects his journey with those before him. Elaborating on the pyramid metaphor (which we see in Orozco’s work), Downing describes the rise (and fall) of Mesoamerica in pyramidal terms: built “layer by layer” through the cultural advancements of the peoples spanning this geography, its peak was southern Mexico (22-23). In this section, Downing refers to the peoples as “immigrants,” migrating southward thousands of years ago from the Bering Strait. Citing J Eric Thompson’s Mexico Before Cortéz (1933), Downing also calls these immigrants “tourists.” He writes: “If Mexico is the ideal summer and winter resort now, it was then. Tourists came a-vagabonding into Mexico. They were so pleased with what they found that they did what tourists still want to do: they settled down” (23). By identifying these first peoples as migrants and tourists, a point he elaborates on with the example of the Maya, he makes travel a constitutive part of Indigenous identity. We get a deeper sense of how the geographic space became populated over time and how migrants become Indigenous to a place over millennia. Referring to the Zapotec oral tradition, Downing writes of the Maya: “…they can scarcely have sprung, as the Zapotes of Oaxaca boasted of themselves, from rocks and

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60 For example, Downing narrates the legend of the god-king Quetzalcoatl. Believed to be a Toltec ruler, Quetzalcoatl traveled to Maya lands where he brought knowledge of architecture etc.
Downing’s attention to early waves of migration highlights an ancient North-South circuit. The motorist’s journey recreates the southward movement into present-day Mexico. Downing might very well try to offer a counterpoint to the reality of the border. In its attempt to fix people in their places, the border is but a new construction along a well-trodden circuit.

Continuing on his travels, the narrator is afforded opportunities to comment on other tourists. This trope is distinctly absent in Tweedie’s and Huxley’s work; it is the native (in its broadest sense) who is under scrutiny. In Downing’s text, the critique of the tourist lends him critical distance and is represented as a function of his Indigenous identity. In one example, Downing identifies the racist who pretends to be free of prejudice: “in Mexico…[he] waxes sentimental over every pot in a market place, defective or not, simply because it is Indian. His words do not ring true to an Indian of Oklahoma. I doubt that they do to an Indian of Mexico” (9). In this example, the narrator identifies his Indigenous identity for the first time. The narrator’s identity enters into the frame because it has shaped his perceptions of the American tourist’s reactions. He is skeptical of the overt over-valexoration of Indigenous crafts and imagines that his Indigenous Mexican neighbor and kin can too. At the same time, Downing’s skepticism resonates with Orozco’s criticism of Mexican indigenistas. Both detect the paternalism implicit in the over-valexoration of Indigenous crafts but from different standpoints and about different groups of indigenistas. In Downing’s example, the Anglo-American

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61 See chapter two for Henestrosa’s written version of Zapotec origin stories.
62 Tweedie traveled throughout Mexico during Porﬁrio Díaz’s presidency. Her writing offers an invaluable account of her meeting with the Mexican President and his second wife. She is an unabashed supporter.
collects their souvenirs to take back North; these souvenirs are tokens to prove the tourist’s open-mindedness, touchstones that they are “in” with the current trend to love all things Indian.

Like his discussion of the Mexican pyramid, Downing’s glimpse into the Indigenous crafts industry may also be in conversation with Huxley’s text. At the very least, the coincidence registers a specific historical moment that both Huxley and Downing record. In his journey through Oaxaca, Huxley notes: “The leather-work is poor; but the pots are pleasant and the gaily coloured string bags and haversacks very pretty, in a rather childish way” (264). In contrast to the American tourist in Downing’s work, Huxley grants little to no value to Indigenous handicrafts. His critique, though misplaced, bears further elaboration. To quote at length, Huxley writes:

Much nonsense has recently been talked about Indian handicrafts... the new William Morrices from the United States have come to Mexico, and, confronted by its peasant arts, have broken out into an intemperate and hysterical enthusiasm. Middletown and Zenith are nightmarish; but this is no reason for asserting that the pretty little peasantries of the Mexican Indians are intrinsically significant works of art. Peasant art is hardly ever intrinsically significant as art; its value is social and psychological, not aesthetic. Mr. Chase says of a well-known arts-and crafts shop in Mexico City that it is ‘as exciting to him as any art museum.’ If that is so, then either Mr. Chase is wholly without a feeling for aesthetic values, or else he is mistaking for aesthetic excitement the pleasure which he derives, as a sociologist, from the mere idea of craftsmanship. (264)

As we see from this passage, Huxley advances the claim that the Anglo-indigenista impulse is a primitivist reaction to working conditions under capitalism. Huxley implicitly refers to mass production, which as Walter Benjamin theorizes, deprives art from its aura. In the Benjaminian sense, “aura” refers to the works’ “presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (220). As Benjamin
describes, mechanical reproduction represents a major shift in the relationship between
art and the masses in the way that its exhibition or entertainment value has superseded its
cult value (rooted in tradition and the sacred) (224-225). The William Morrises of the
U.S., in Huxley’s quote, refer to those who value folk cultures and their crafts as art that
retains this aura. In Huxley’s estimation, the Morris turn to Indigenous Mexican
handicrafts because they still represent authenticity in production and freedom from the
grit and grime of modern industrial processes. Huxley’s argument falls short in that he
does not apply the same logic to the Mexican case. In his estimation, the leather-work
and string bags are works made by “craftsmen” who “simultaneously work and play”
whereas the Middletown and Zenith workers are “wage slaves” (265). This thinking lays
bear the assumption that Mexico represents a pre-capitalist economy; the Indigenous
peasants do not fit his definition of a wage-earner. Huxley’s critique of Indigenous
handicrafts resembles Orozco’s because he describes their failure as art rather than their
role as commodities. Downing’s skepticism of over-valorization appears to straddle these
two poles: his narrator sees how everyday household objects are granted status and
debated as art within non-native circles at the same time that they are made to function in
a market economy with little improvement in the lives of their Indigenous creators.

When Downing calls attention to the Indigenous narrator a second time, he
undermines the tourist’s facile observation about phenotype. Indeed, some of the most
troublesome aspects of Huxley’s and Tweedie’s work is their cruel descriptions of
Indigenous and mestizo peoples’ physical characteristics. And few writers can dismantle
racism with wit as Downing can. Leaving Victoria, the capital of Tamaulipas, Downing’s
narrator notes:
When a lady, whose eyesight may possibly have been better than mine asked if I had noticed “how much darker the natives get at the Tropic of Cancer,” I assured her that I had noted this phenomenon; in fact, my bare forearm, resting on the car door, had begun to take on a deeper tan as we passed a white post in to the torrid zone. I have no doubt her observation was figuratively true at least, for here Indian elements in mestizo culture must greatly outnumber Spanish, and the influence of Texas is felt no more. (12)

The narrator’s joke works because of the way he reworks the adjective “darker” into its verb form. The narrator identifies as Native and draws attention to literal tanning in the sun; the sun, in this climate, darkens all. While the lady’s observation may simply be descriptive, the narrator’s joke dismantles the assumed connection between phenotype and so-called immutable ethnic traits. As we have seen in the previous chapter, discussions about cultural identity in this period are never far from discussions of race. This example is particularly noteworthy because Downing undermines skin color as a direct and immutable marker of identity with humor. The lady in this passage resembles Tweedie’s many comments about the “natives” and their physical characteristics. Having traveled with her Kodak, Tweedie includes several photographs of Mexican and Indian “types.” Downing is trying to move beyond visual cues to a discussion about Indigenous identity outside the frame of race while tackling the issue of racism head on (as in the example of the American tourist and pottery). In subsequent passages, examined below and in the next section, we see how Downing elaborates on this cultural and land-based understanding of Indigenous and mestizo identity.

In another example of the Anglo-American tourist, Downing draws attention to a North-South cultural primitivism. He writes that he met a young lady from California who was “ecstatic about Indians: their handicrafts, their babies, their politeness, their
musical voices, everything. She was studying indigenous art and folk dances and the Aztec language in the summer school of the National University of Mexico” (9). In this example, the narrator uses indirect speech to report on the Californian’s enthusiasm in contrast to the use of quoted speech in the previous two examples. This strategy helps the narrator elaborate on her conversation while mocking it. Thus, when he describes that she “joined” an Indian family for lunch and ate their tortillas, he adds the parenthetical comment in his own voice: “(‘horned in on,’ I would have said)” (9). He casts doubt on her choice of words, and by extension the very way she understood her interaction with the family. The Californian claims she would love to live in Mexico and “thinks it’s wonderful – the way [Indians] are coming into their own” (9). Once the narrator has fully established her enthusiasm, dedication, and imposition, he asks, “You have Indians out in California, don’t you?” (10). The narrator observes: “She frowned,” before she claimed: “Oh, that’s different. They’re not –well, yes, I guess they are the same race. But –“ (10). The Californian does not notice California Indians. On the one hand, they are too close to home; they are Californian, living on the northern side of the border. On the other hand, they are also invisible. She does not immediately perceive their race as she is unsure of how to classify California Indians. Tellingly, this example reveals the strong connection between race, labor, and the perceptions of history. As Mexico embraced its pre-Columbian history, a Mexican and U.S.-based tourism created a market for Indigenous Mexican handicrafts. The Indigenous Mexican was a significant part of the labor force to maintain the industry and their visibility was thus heightened. Rather, “Californio” and “Mexican” cultures symbolized California’s romantic past, and normalizing Mexican labor.
Downing launches his socio-cultural definition of indigeneity as a response to the anecdote of the Californian. The narrator is jarred by the Californian’s reference to race, and his host tries to diffuse the situation. The host claims, “she was just kidding you, of course. She knew all the time that you’re an Indian yourself” (10). The narrator explains that people like the Californian (the Miss Blanks of the world) ought to think of the white, mestizo, and indio categories as “psychological” rather than racial. Through narrating a parable of three brothers, the narrator explains that one’s identity is created through place, family, language, and exterior markers like clothing. The narrator chooses the term psychological because he sees each brother identifying with their different families; one thinks he’s white because he grew up thinking so, speaking Spanish, living in the city, and so forth, while the other two brothers undergo similar mental processes. Downing offers concrete examples of his explanation: Benito Juarez was “Indian,” Santa Anna was “white,” and Porfirio Díaz was “mestizo” (11). The narrator reveals identity as a complex web of factors, including actions and motivations; this focus goes beyond essentializing one’s phenotypic difference and reveals race as a social construct.

Travel writing in *The Mexican Earth* foregrounds the narrator’s difference, and provides an optic from which the narrator explores the implications of racialized difference. Acknowledging that he is an “Indian from Oklahoma,” the narrator recognizes that he is a traveler in another country, and as a traveler, he is constituted in power relations differently. At the same time, the narrator acknowledges a shared indigeneity rooted in the land and history, and a familiarity with Mexico based on his extensive travel. As a literary strategy, the narrator is transformed into the reader’s tour guide, translating Mexico and Indigenous Mexico for the English-speaking audience.
Of Its Time and Beyond: The 1930s Optic

Downing’s fictional travelogue chronicles Mexican history at the same time that it is shaped by its own historical moment of the late 1930s. As we saw in the previous section, indigenista politics and the discursive frame of mestizaje pervade Downing’s text (as well as Huxley’s) but these discussions were but one part of a larger discourse on race during the early twentieth century. What we see is a layered engagement with history. First, *The Mexican Earth*, like other English-language books on Mexico, offers an outside look into Mexico’s historical, political, and cultural formation. Second, Downing’s text works at the linguistic margins of a contested, intellectual terrain in which Mexican scholars argued about the nature of Mexico and of Mexicans - a debate with its own intellectual history. Third, when Downing writes about race and culture in Mexico, he is keenly aware that the Western world is irrupting precisely along these lines. In other words, at this time race is the dominant way of understanding people’s relations to each other, even if it is an ideological construct obfuscating class, gender, and religious dynamics.

A cursory look at the sources he drew from to write *The Mexican Earth* reveals his engagement with an intellectual and literary tradition that could have benefitted, in its time, from an Indigenous perspective. Downing drew from both Spanish-language and English-Language sources. Notable scholarly sources in Spanish include: Andrés Molina Enríquez’s *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (1909), Manuel Gamio’s *Forjando Patria* (1916), and Alfonso Caso’s *Instituciones precortesianes* (1934). Notable English-language sources about Mexican history include: William H. Prescott’s *The Conquest of Mexico* (1895), Carlton Beals’s *Porfirio Díaz* (1932), and Frank Tannenbaum’s *Peace by
Revolution (1933). Downing was also well read in the Spanish crónicas and in Mexican literature: Alfonso Reyes’s Visión de Anahuac (1923), Mariano Azuela’s Los de abajo (1929), and Martín Luis Guzmán’s El aguila y la serpiente (1930).

It was not lost on Downing that Mexican intellectuals were in the throes of constructing a Mexican nationalism set on assimilating the Indian. A large part of this discussion, as we saw in the preceding section, was about a nation’s “people” or “ethnic unity”. Through a detailed study of class and racial stratification and governance inherited since the colonial-era, Andrés Molina Enríquez’s Los grandes problemas nacionales advances the thesis that Mexico’s Indigenous populations needed to be better integrated into society. In his writing, the mestizo was a distinct social group. As we explored in chapter one, the mestizo subject was elevated in the post-revolutionary period as the ideal Mexican citizen, to which Molina Enríquez’s work contributed. His writing on the mestizo reflects a mixed view of the mestizo that nonetheless embraces his revolutionary spirit. Molina Enríquez writes: “el tipo de mestizo era y es tipo de raza inferior” (“the mestizo type was and is of inferior race”) (43). He is “vulgar, rude, desconfiado, inquieto e impetuoso; pero terco, fiel, generoso y sufrido. Nada puede identificarlo mejor que la palabra con que fue bautizado por la gente decente: chicano…desarrapado” (“vulgar, rude, untrustworthy, restless and impetuous; but stubborn, loyal, generous, long suffering. Nothing can identify him better than with the word the decent people baptized him with: chicano… shabby”) (43). For Molina Enríquez, there is no choice but to hand over the nation to the mestizo as neither the criollo nor Indigenous elements would be patriotic enough, their ties conceivably to other political formations. He continues:
si el elemento mestizo es el elemento más fuerte, más numeroso y más patriota del país en el debe continuar el gobierno de la nación; si en él está la patria verdadera, entregar la dirección de los destinos nacionales a cualquiera otro de los elementos de la población es poco menos que hacer traición a la patria (if the mestizo element is the strongest, most numerous, and most patriotic element of the nation then it is here that the government of the nation should continue; if in this element lies the truest patriot, to hand over the nation’s destiny to any other element is little less than betraying the nation). (309)

The historical gap between Molina Enríquez’s and Downing’s text’s is thirty years, a long time when considering the fall of the Díaz regime, the Mexican Revolutionary War, and the immediate nation-building efforts of the 1920s. Even though Molina Enríquez would offer Downing an intellectual lens to view Mexican culture, which manifests in his use of the source, Downing departs from Molina Enríquez’s view on Mexican race-relations. Downing sees mestizaje as a much more social process. Whereas Molina Enríquez is quick to break up peoples into elements with specific character traits, a characteristic of the positivist thinking of the turn of the century, Downing emphasizes how contact and trade shaped communities and cultural norms. And, he sees that this process has been much more thorough in northern Mexico. He writes: “...the more accessible a region is, the more thorough has been the mingling of blood and cultures. Proximity to Monterrey, a topography whose natural obstacles are easily circuited by trails and roads, the passage of the Monterrey-Tampico branch of the National Railways – these are factors which have made the country down to the rose gardens of Victoria predominantly mestizo” (11).

A major factor influencing Downing’s musings on race and ethnic identity is the rise of Nazism in Europe. He writes: “Indian. Mestizo. White. In these days of so much chest thumping and shouting in parade-ground voices about race, it seems futile to try to
get in a sane word on the subject” (9). As Downing was writing the text in the late 1930s, Adolf Hitler and his Nazi troops were advancing their genocidal war in Europe against Jews and other ethnic minorities, which he references through parading and shouting. It is clear that Downing sees racialized thinking as violent and maddening; like his predecessor Vasconcelos, Downing was writing against Aryanism and white privilege. Because ethnic identity was a major way of conceptualizing a nation, this tension plays out in Downing’s handling of the subject. Indian, mestizo, and white become “psychological” traits and mestizaje an inevitable outcome of contact and trade. But, we have seen how Downing’s own worldview as a Choctaw contributed to his shaping a narrator with the ability to see through indigenista rhetoric and denounce racism. In contrast to Vasconcelos’s argument of privileging mestizaje, Downing’s work on race deconstructs it. He looks more closely at diversity, fitting the pieces together to show “communities… in the making” (24). As a travelogue, Downing’s narrator is expected to write about and interpret what he sees. The satire and irony we see working in the text help him to acknowledge and demystify racist thinking while trying to reach a more nuanced understanding of diversity.

Downing’s narrator dispels overt nationalist claims that Mexico ought to be a mestizo nation because he has a nuanced view about mestizo-Indigenous connections. His firsthand experience traveling through the land and the affinity he constructs with Indigenous peoples on both sides of the border predispose him to read through the established rhetoric about race. Where the text gets more complicated is in discussions about nation-building and its relationship to the past. To unpack this idea, I turn to Manuel Gamio’s *Forjando Patria*, another one of Downing’s sources about Mexico.
Published in 1916, *Forjando Patria* was and continues to be a seminal text about Mexican nation building. Downing refers to Gamio, “the dean of Mexican anthropologists” and his fieldwork several times in the book: his research in Vera Cruz about religious syncretism and in Teotihuacán in a project that included excavation and community projects. In *Forjando Patria*, Gamio advances the claim that Mexico can build a nation if it assimilates the Indian, which previous attempts by colonialists and creole nationalists throughout Latin America had failed to do. In his opening chapter, Gamio likens nation-building to sculpture; with wrought prose, he describes how the people needed to mix both the bronze and iron elements of their culture to create a statue that could remain upright. Gamio, a student of anthropology under Franz Boas, believed that anthropological research, particularly ethnology, was central to the nation-building process. As he describes, there had been little to no anthropological research of Mexico’s Indigenous populations. How then could the minority population effectively incorporate the heterogenous majority? Gamio postulated that the four conditions for national identity: (1) ethnic unity (2) a common language (3) moral, religious, political, and aesthetic cultural cohesion across classes, and (4) a shared history were notably absent throughout Latin-America. Gamio believed that Mexico ought to claim a shared history in its Indigenous populations’ pre-Columbian past. He laments that pre-Columbian

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63 See 132-133.
64 See 266-268. In this latter example, Downing refers explicitly to Vasconcelos’s work as Secretary of Education as the cultural link to Gamio’s sociological approach. He quotes Gamio: ‘It was necessary…that a painter, a true painter, of sound technique, broad vision, highly sensitive, and with a keen analytic point of view…” paint the valley. According to Downing, Vasconcelos took up this call. As the “most generous patron of the arts,” all can see the “frescoes which give proof for all to see of what the Indian had to contribute to Mexican civilization” (268).
history was not taken seriously, and gives us an indication of the nature of research and education on the topic. Arguing that the history of the pre-Columbian past must be written, he writes: “Regarding the civilizations that inhabited Mexico before the Conquest, these prejudices against the Indian race are so great that they have contributed to an erroneous, fantastic, and inadmissible account of our own history. Even the facts presented in our textbooks are often erroneous, lacking in historical perspective, and presented without scientific methodology” (40).

If Downing’s history worked as nationalist history, it would- even in its day- offer a transindigenous perspective, demonstrating how Gamio’s goal of “unity” (a code for mestizaje) was unlikely. Regarding Gamio’s point about history, Downing describes the history of the land that would become Mexico as a multi-tribal geography. *The Mexican Earth* begins its look at Mexico’s pre-Columbian history with an inclusive look at the peoples shaping the “pyramid.” Unlike Orozco in *The Epic of American Civilization*, Downing sees plurality in the pre-Columbian past. It does not begin with the Aztec migration, but with the Mayan migrations. Downing delves into the Maya migrations southward (“some time in the first millennium BC”) and back northward into Yucatán (“between 530 and 629 A.D.”) (29, 32). In this description, Downing summarizes the Mayan calendric system and refers to stelae to trace the movement northward. In addition to his look at the Mayan past, he recognizes that Tarascans, Zapotecs, and Toltecs were living in the same time period and influencing each other’s cultures. Downing’s brief look at the pre-Columbian past would extend the Mexican nation-state’s focus on an Aztec-past. Rather than relying on a mythical interpretation of the past that can be used to elevate one group over another in the name of ethnic unity, Downing draws on the
historical and scientific research of his day to account for a fuller and more complex look at the history of Indigenous Mexico and the way it works into the present.

Just as Downing draws attention to traveling and simultaneity in the past, the narrator intersects the past with the present. In one of his many traveling anecdotes, the narrator recounts a humorous twist to the narrative of a continuous history. Downing writes:

A tourist turned resident took her Indian cook to see the exhibits in the prehistoric cemetery. The Indian was unresponsive until she spied a particular grinding stone. That brought a delighted cry from her. She wanted to handle it; she begged her mistress to buy it for use in her kitchen. ‘The very metate I have been looking for! If I had it I could make such beautiful little tortillas’”. (28)

Downing inserts this anecdote into a discussion about the archeological findings from the lava in Cuicuilco (in the Valley of Mexico). There is an overwhelming power dynamic packed into this brief anecdote in terms of the relationship between the elite, naturalized but foreign, woman and the Indigenous woman “help.” When read within the context of excavations and history writing, the anecdote speaks to the way that this process of “invention” was removed from the day-to-day experience of Indigenous peoples living in Mexico. Because excavations and research into the pre-Columbian past were meant to “invent” nation-state history, the Indigenous woman’s responses are particularly revealing. She is not too amused by the prehistoric “cemetery” meant to showcase the dead as a token of nationalist patrimony. As a reader, I wonder if she wanted to go with her “boss” the mistress/head of household in the first place. In contrast to the cemetery itself, she is interested in the metate, the stone grinder she would use as the Indian cook in that household. What did she see in its size, shape, and depth to elicit such a response?
The *metate* speaks to the Indigenous woman’s workplace needs because, from what we can infer, it was well made. Rather than locating continuity in pyramids as symbols of power, the *metate* locates tradition in technologies, practices, and food.

In terms of linguistic and ethnic unities, Downing describes linguistic plurality and cross-border affinity. As he travels southward, Downing discusses the various language groups associated with the region he traverses. Aztec, he writes, “is one of sixteen languages, each in turn subdivided into dialects, making up the most important stock of Mexico: the Nahuatlan, which belongs to the Shoshonean group spoken by Indians as far north as Montana and Oregon” (Downing 13). Aztec is the “Mexican language” whereas “fully two million inhabitants of Mexico” do not speak Spanish, “the official language” (Downing 13). Downing works through several complex ideas vis-à-vis Indigenous languages. He draws attention to the split between an “official” language and a dialect. As we will see in chapter three, Indigenous languages in Mexico were considered dialects by non-natives. Downing points out (no doubt to those Americans who think Mexicans speak Mexican) that Aztec (Nahuatl) was the language of the Mexicas. This focus on language is important because it attests to a pluri-lingual presence and ethnic diversity at the same time that it shows linguistic “families” that extend far beyond the U.S.-Mexico border where North and South collide. Set within the context of his travels, Downing’s narrator listens to the languages around him. Downing undermines Gamio’s call to create national cohesion based on a sense of unity across all four categories because it erases difference. In doing so, it erases Indigenous identities (as well as those of other ethnic minorities in Mexico) and their presence in Mexico.
As Downing’s narrator moves into his own historical moment, his enthusiasm for Mexico as an Indigenous Mexico grows. For instance, Downing focuses on Cardenas’s indigenista policies in the chapter entitled, “The Return of Quetzalcoatl,” meant to symbolize a history of peace as well as scientific and cultural advancements (as we see depicted in *The Epic of American Civilization*). In this chapter, we see the travel and historical threads coming together. In this chapter, he specifically alludes to Huxley. Downing writes that Huxley went “sour in the Guatemalan jungles,” which speaks to Huxley’s disdain for Oaxaca and the people there (308). In alluding to Huxley, the narrator remarks on an important difference in their approaches to travel and Mexico. Downing writes: “I have never followed his advice to pull down the shade and read Spinoza” (309). He jokes that all the blinds he’s encountered in his travels “[do] not wish to come down” (309). Rather than disengage with the world around him and travel in books, the narrator wants to see and experience the world even on the train. He is busy talking to those around him: the American and the Mexican family with the young son Héctor.

Downing’s discussions with the American bring attention to the intertwined histories of Mexican and U.S. indigenismo. On the train, the narrator listens and talks to the American who will not stop complaining about the trains. The narrator surmises that it is an effort to vilify Cardenas and the nationalization of the train system. In discussing Cardenas’s regime, Downing applauds his efforts to revive the *ejido* system (communal lands), redistribute empty lands for farming, and construct dams (313-318). Informed by the lens of his own moment, he sees “that the great conquest of the Revolution was a

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65 When Tweedie was writing, the trains were largely in British hands.
return to Indian values, concretely expressed in that pre-Conquest institution, the *ejido*.

There is no wall around Mexico, of course, but whatever form its national life ultimately assumes it is going to have its roots in Mexican soil, like corn and the maguey” (319).

Max Parra notes that post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism was buttressed by the mythic representation of the Revolution as a “ruptura drástica con un pasado de características semi-feudales” (“a drastic rupture with a past of semi-feudal characteristics”) (29). This past refers to the Díaz regime that the reconfigured nation-state worked to define itself against.

I draw attention to this passage because Downing inherits the idea that the Revolution is an extraordinary break with the past, in this case, a colonial rather than a feudal past. However, for Downing, this break represents a return to Indigenous values as orienting principles of the political system. Earlier in the text, Downing remarks that the *ejido* system is not “anything peculiarly Mexican” (108). He writes:

> In 1492 Amerindian life from Cape Horn to Bering Sea was characterized by communal ownership of real estate, based on the family group. We of the United States need not look outside our own boundaries to see what happened when the indigenous system was disrupted by roughshod conquerors and the foreign principle of individual property imposed. Yet today, when a commissioner of Indian affairs encourages Indian tribes to return to a degree of communal organization, politicians, missionaries and others with axe to grind raise the cry of Russian influence! (109)

Downing observes the overt parallels between progressive nation-state reform: the expropriation law of 1936 in Mexico and Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican constitution on the one hand and John Collier and the Wheeler-Howard Act (Indian Reorganization Act) of 1934 on the other hand. Both laws of the 1930s worked to collectivize lands and were centerpieces of land and Indian policy reform. Downing sees how factions on both sides
of the border who want to enshrine individual property rights challenge these reforms and see them as measures leading to communism rather than capitalism. In this example, we can see how Downing’s narrator maintains a North-South gaze attuned to nation-state histories and continued Indigenous presences. His experience as an American Indian grants him an additional optic to explore Indigenous Mexico. He sees its revolutionary potential to make Indigenous values and peoples central to its nation-state project.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that *The Mexican Earth* exemplifies intellectual mediation in the way that it offers an Indigenous history of Mexico, a nation-state in the throes of indigenismo. Downing constructs an Indigenous narrator to travel through Mexico while commenting on and narrating its history. In the process, Downing draws upon a bilingual archive to mediate between the tensions that non-native writers have replicated in their writing on Indigenous Mexico and his firsthand experience that attests to a continued Indigenous presence. Some of the tensions he works through include the interpretation of Mexican history, the assimilation of Indigenous peoples, and creating a modern, Mexican nation-state. As Downing works through these tensions according to his own intellectual formation, he seeks to illuminate his readers and transform them into more critical and inclusive “travelers.” To make my argument, I have drawn from a North-South methodology that attempts to mirror Downing’s methodology. Drawing from the English-language and Spanish-language texts that he cites in his own work, I put his text in conversation with his research material. In this way, I extend Cox’s important
recovery of *The Mexican Earth* to make the case that the text can be read as a forebear to a transnational and comparativist turn in Indigenous Studies.

*The Mexican Earth* would be Downing’s last major publication until the Choctaw language primer. But his message about seeing through indigenista rhetoric persisted. We see this message clearly in his brief but magnanimous and witty book review of yet another seminal text: Luis Villoro’s *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo en Mexico* (“The Greatest Moments of Mexican Indigenismo”). The review was published in 1953 in *Books Abroad* and is reproduced in full:

A carefully systematized study of the various concepts of Indianism which have been expressed in Mexico – by white men, of course – from the Conquest through the times of Francisco Javier Clavijero, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, and Manuel Orozco y Berra, to the present. It is a work of considerable academic interest; at the conclusion the author gazes out of his study window at the Indians animating a Mexican street and reflects that “en su fondo, más atrás de todos nuestros juicios y lecturas, se alberga una realidad oculta y mysteriosa que no podemos alcanzar y cuya presencia nos fascina” (“at its heart, beyond all of our judgements and readings, there remains a hidden and mysterious reality that we cannot reach and whose presence fascinates us”). (298)

The American Indian scholar, critic, and traveler reviews the work of a Mexican scholar writing about indigenismo. Downing’s work challenges us to take that first step on the other side.
Chapter Three:
Escribiendo Patria (“Writing the Nation”):
Andrés Henestrosa and Neza

During the 1930s, Zapotec writers from the Isthmus of Oaxaca continued a long legacy of writing. To better understand this body of writing, this chapter examines one of the literary highlights of the latter part of that decade, Neza, as an example of tribal-centric writing that engaged with both Indigenous and Mexican nation-building. From 1935-1939, Neza was a journal produced and distributed by the Sociedad Nueva de Estudiantes Juchitecos (“The New Society of Juchitéc Students” henceforth Sociedad). Neza, which means water and “camino río” (“river road”), aimed at connecting the efforts and concerns of an intellectual circle of Juchitecos (“people from Juchitán”) in Mexico City with Juchitecos from the Isthmus. Evidence from its contents indicates that the journal circulated to Native and non-native readers in the capital as well as amongst Juchitecos in the Isthmus and in other parts of the country. Although the actual number of copies distributed at any one time is unknown, its cost wavered from 5, 10, and 20 Mexican cents. In an effort to increase its readership, several issues from 1936 were free.

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66 Nesha was the original title of the journal. It was changed to Neza in Volume I, number 5 to reflect a growing consensus about Zapotec phonetics and orthography.
67 For example Volume II, number 16 includes an “Opiniones” section with comments praising Neza from Cayetano González in Santo Domingo Ingenio, Oaxaca, Rafael Guerrero in Reforma, Oaxaca, Benita R. Marín a Juchiteca living in Tapacula, Chiapas, and President of the “Sociedad Regional Istmeña” in Agua Dulce, Vera Cruz (no name is included). “Neza en la Universidad” (Volume II, number 13) indicates that a history professor, Arturo Arnaíz y Freg described the journal to his students as a “fuente de información” (“source of information”) making contributions to “la Historia” (“History” with a capital H) (2).
68 For a list of donors see Volume II, numbers 16-20.
While scholars generally acknowledge the journal, there is little work to suggest that it has formed an object of study in and of itself. Zapotec intellectual Víctor de la Cruz acknowledges that Neza has been overlooked. In Guie’ Sti’ Diídaxzá: La Flor de la Palabra (1999), he writes: “en la capital del país fueron ensayistas Enrique Liekens, Jeremías López Chiñas, Andrés Henestrosa, Gabriel López Chiñas, y otros más cuyos trabajos todavía falta recuperar en Neza” (“in the nation’s capital [Mexico City], there were essayists Enrique Liekens, Jeremías López Chiñas, Andrés Henestrosa, Gabriel López Chiñas, and others whose work still needs to be recuperated from Neza”) (37). In an effort to recover some of the essayists’ work, I examine issues related to language and literacy during Neza’s height from 1935-1936. From 1935-1936, the editors published a total of twenty issues. Due to this large scope, I focus on Andrés Henestrosa’s literary and intellectual contributions and the responses they generated from within the Zapotec intellectual community. I focus on Henestrosa’s work for two reasons: (1) his work has generated a large non-native readership, and through excavating his contributions to Neza, we can see his direct engagement with a Zapotec readership. By the time Andrés Henestrosa served as the first editor-in-chief of Neza from 1935-1936, he had already established himself as a serious writer with the publication of his book Los hombres que dispersó la danza, a collection of Zapotec oral traditions (1929). He founded the Sociedad Nueva de Estudiantes Juchitecos and participated in La Academia de la Lengua Zapoteca (“The Academy of Zapotec Language”). (2) His literary and intellectual research and pursuits resonates with the work by American Indian writers examined in this dissertation. Like John Joseph Mathews who traveled South when he was a Guggenheim fellow, Henestrosa traveled North when he was awarded a Guggenheim
Fellowship from 1936-1938. Much like Todd Downing, Henestrosa fashioned himself as a mediator and “tour guide” of Zapotec and Spanish literatures and languages.

While his literary and intellectual contributions have had an extraordinary impact on Zapotec research and culture, this chapter seeks to place Henestrosa within his intellectual context, highlighting how his contributions exemplify a particularly robust period of Zapotec cultural revival. In this approach, I seek out the Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections created within the Neza community, particularly as they create Indigenous afterlives for their cultural productions. These three areas of inquiry reveal how Henestrosa’s work in Neza was part of a grassroots effort to reclaim and create Indigenous afterlives for the Zapotec language, history, and culture during indigenismo in Mexico. I argue that this revival project in Neza captures survivance at work in the way that modern Zapotec writers confronted the reality of a declining literacy in Zapotec as well as thought in and alongside the Spanish language and its alphabet. To support my claim, I examine three areas of inquiry: Henestrosa as an Indigenous intellectual, his column entitled “Guía del Lector” (“A Reader’s Guide”), and the re-publications of Zapotec oral traditions from Los hombres que dispersó la danza (henceforth Hombres).

Through my examination of these three areas of inquiry, I trace how Henestrosa’s work helped to circulate Zapotec oral and written traditions that could be read alongside and as a part of the Mexican literary and intellectual landscape. In the way that modernism would be “invented” through journals such as Poetry, The Little Review, Blast, and The Blue Review, Neza reveals the making of a transindigenous modernism.69 It foregrounds

69 In a joint venture between Brown University and the University of Tulsa, The Modernist Journals Project is digitizing many of these foundational little journals. Their
how Indigenous scholars, like Henestrosa, had to literally and metaphorically travel between different traditions, languages, and geographies to make their Indigenous and tribal-centric work legible at the same time that they are insisting that the modern, Mexican state has transindigenous roots. This chapter thus raises broader questions about the archive, tradition, and the canon that resonate within Indigenous Studies and Modernism studies.

**Zapotec Survivance**

Post-revolutionary Mexico had a goal of writing for all (Marcus 86). This ambition was a response to the widespread illiteracy tolerated in the nineteenth century, an era characterized by the rise of nationalism, modernization, neocolonialism, liberalism, and foreign intervention. As we saw in chapter one, post-revolutionary Mexico successfully connected nation-building and modernization, prompting a move to “uplift” illiterate Indigenous and mestizo peoples. Stephen Kowalesky and Jacqueline J. Saindon define literacy in the era as the ability to read and write in Spanish- not in one’s Indigenous language- and trace how literacy spread with the modernization of Oaxaca through the spread of schools, the Pan-American Highway, bus routes, and centers of production. In theory, literacy for all implied a move to assimilate Zapotec writing even as it strived to make reading and writing more democratic. Modern Zapotec writers slogan is “modernism began in the magazines.” See http://www.modjourn.org/about.html.

70 The nineteenth century is also a time of increased intolerance of Indigenous languages. See Romero-Frizzi 17.
would have to work bilingually to confront the reality of a declining literacy in Zapotec as well as think in and alongside the Spanish language and its alphabet.  

Gerald Vizenor’s (Anishinaabe) concept of “survivance,” imported from Native North American studies, provides a critical language to assess Henestrosa’s work as an example of modern Zapotec writing within the linguistic and literary assimilationist milieu of the 1930s. Vizenor defines survivance as an effect of native storied presence, which he defines as transmotion. The PostIndian warrior who uses literature to contest the simulations of the “Indian” that feed into domination exemplifies and enacts survivance. Survivance is thus produced, lived, and narrated as a result of their resistance to these simulations and is documented in these “new stories of tribal courage” (4). Vizenor’s neologism is widely read as a portmanteau of the words “survival” and “resistance.” Vizenor’s concept provides a lens to read the making of Indigenous afterlives in Neza. Neza, as I will show in my analysis of its content, can be read as a medium (“a living archive”) for telling these “new stories” of Zapotec resistance to

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71 Victor de la Cruz, a Zapotec intellectual from the Isthmus, describes how this modern conundrum still resonates for contemporary Zapotec writers. He strikes a more pessimistic tone about the future of indigenous languages and literatures in the essay, “Reflexiones sobre la escritura y el futuro de la literatura indígena.” He writes “…en el caso de los indígenas binnizá, se plantea la problemática de qué deben aceptar de la modernidad y qué deben conservar de la tradición, qué hacer para seguir siendo binnizá a pesar de los cambios y no quedar como estatuas petrificadas para exhibición en museos” (“in the case of the binnizá [Zapotecs], there is the problem of what ought to be accepted of modernity and what ought to be conserved of tradition, what to do to continue being binnizá despite the changes and not become petrified statues for exhibit in museums”) (R 498).

72 Translating the term into Spanish does not necessarily require the formation of a new word but it would elide the North-South exchange this dissertation foregrounds. In Spanish, sobrevivencia “survival” and resistencia “resistance” are abstract nouns formed with the suffix “–ncia.” Although attributing a sense of meaning to the rhyme is impossible because it is a common word ending, it nonetheless yokes the two words.
domination. Like the PostIndian’s “new stories,” *Neza* tells old and new stories that exhibit tribal courage and insight. In the Indigenous Mexican context of the 1930s, domination would refer to geographical, political, cultural, and linguistic pressures to assimilate into mestizo culture. For instance, because Indigenous languages were devalued as dialects, Indigenous Mexicans were presumed to assimilate into mestizo culture by learning Spanish. In this case (prior to postmodern deconstruction), a PostIndian would no doubt refer to a mestizo. The mestizo was a simulation of the Indian that fed into dominance. In the assimilationist milieu of post-revolutionary Mexico, there would be no Indigenous afterlife for the PostIndian.

Where Vizenor uses the term “tribal courage,” I use the term “tribal-centric” to refer to *Neza*’s focus on the recovery and interpretation of Zapotec oral and written traditions. Through this tribal-centric body of work, the modern Zapotec survives and resists domination. As we will see, the recovery and phoneticization of the Zapotec language was central to the making of this tribal-centric literature. In my choice to use the term “tribal-centric,” I recognize that a term like “pueblo-centric,” although might best capture the Spanish-language sense of nation, would only lead to confusion. I am thinking, of course, of the presence of Pueblo peoples in the US Southwest. The writers of *Neza* did not refer to themselves as “tribal,” but as Juchitecos and paisanos. They used the terms Zapotec or *B’inniza,* when making claims about the larger group. As James Clifford writes, the term tribal is: “a catchall, the concept of tribe has its source in Western projection and administrative necessity rather than in any essential quality or group of traits…[it] is a product of limited Western taxonomies” (*P* 191). In spite of this

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73 Zapotec-language term for Zapotec.
history, Clifford recognizes that the term is being “embraced...as a crucial strategic ground for identity” (P 191).

In contemporary Native North American scholarship we see this reclamation strongly in the American Indian literary nationalist paradigm and the use of the terms tribal and tribal-nation. Craig S. Womack succinctly captures this revival: “My greatest wish is that tribes, and tribal members, will have an increasingly important role in evaluating tribal literatures” (RR 1). Several years later, Womack argues for recognizing tribes as cultures and as governments (the tribal-national) (RT). However, he writes: “The notion of just what makes tribal literature tribal is a vexing problem... It is much easier to describe the tribalness of tribal literature as a process than to pin down a definition; the frustrating paradox has to do with the fact that one is, nonetheless, often put in the position of having to come up with a definition” (23). In Spanish, the term “tribu” has not undergone a similar process of intellectual and political reclamation. Because of this geopolitical difference, the contemporary Spanish-language speaker may find it difficult to conceive of the Zapotecs as a once “tribal” or even “primitive” society given their millennial culture. Nonetheless, I find the term useful particularly in creating a North-South dialogue about the critical language we can use to understand transindigenous cultural formations. In addition, I find in Downing’s work a precedent for identifying

74 For example, María de los Ángeles Romero Frizzi writes the Zapotecs developed the oldest American writing system, dating to 600-400 B.C.E; the writing system developed at Monte Albán was a mix of iconographic writing in which icons had precise meanings within the culture and phonetic writing, a system of symbols representing the phonemes of the spoken language (Romero Frizzi 7, 29). At Monte Albán, Zapotec elites used writing on stones, stelae, lintels, and murals to record calendars and to communicate histories and genealogies amongst the elite and to visiting ambassadors (Romero Frizzi 25-27).
Indigenous Mexican pueblos as “tribal.” Of the Yaquis in Sonora (northern Mexico), he writes: “To apply the term racial minority to the Yaquis is to give them a distinction which they do not possess. They constitute a tribe. Their attitude may even be called nationalistic” (215).

The work of critical Native studies scholars in the North and South demonstrate that the tribal-nation/ pueblo has its roots prior to the nation-state. Where North and South depart in this instance is in the material and “imagined” relationship to the nation-state; nation-to-nation in the North and plurination in the South. The pueblo is not separate from the “patria” (“homeland”) of Mexico but the aim is its autonomy. To understand this difference, we can turn to Neza. In one instance, the editorial staff includes a statement of agreement with Enrique Liekens’s proposal to form a Mexican cultural defense league (Volume II, number 4). They write: “A nosotros nos interesa esto porque un aspecto de la cultura Mexicana lo constituye la cultura zapoteca” (This interests us because the Zapotec culture is one aspect of the Mexican culture”) (4). From a critical Native perspective of the North, this kind of statement may seem to be a contradiction to tribal-centric work and survivance. How can a tribal-group survive and resist nation-state violence and assimilation if they see themselves as a part of the nation-state? In Mexico, as in other parts of Latin-America, Indigenous peoples refer to “autonomy” (also self-determination). Lynn Stephen writes, “in most cases, self-

75 My use of “imagined” here is deliberate to refer to Benedict Anderson’s notion of imagined communities. Womack, likewise, takes up Anderson’s cue, “A key component of nationhood is a people’s idea of themselves, their imaginings of who they are” (RR 14).

76 In the original, “Liga Defensora de la Cultura Mexicana” (Volume I, number 4, page 4).
determination does not imply secession from the nation-state but the broadening of rights within the structure of the nation-state” (4). This political language emerges in the late twentieth century, reflecting a growing reality of Indigenous demands on the nation-state. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) is one such example. Even though the EZLN is 99 percent Indigenous, Josefina Saldaña Portillo notes that they refuse to define their movement as a strictly “Indian” one but rather “launch their struggle from the subject position of ‘citizens of the nation’” (405). Although the writers of Neza describe their work as primarily cultural, their work carries a similar understanding of autonomy. Their project is one of providing an Indigenous afterlife to the Zapotec language and culture through writing, interpretation, and appreciation. In this way, they contribute to its survivance within the broader frame of Mexican culture.

Under the Mexican President Lázaro Cardenas’s tenure from 1934-1940, official indigenismo was running full course. The government promoted the country’s modernization through targeted political, social, and cultural efforts to assimilate its large Indigenous populations into the larger, mestizo body politic. In 1940, Cardenas helped to organize as well as participated in the First Inter-American Indigenous Conference in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, an important event from which the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) was conceived. 77 In the field of education, Cardenas’s presidency signals a discursive shift in understanding Mexico’s ethnic and social relations. The discourse of mestizaje informed the indigenista policies and practices throughout post-revolutionary Mexico’s educational reform. In the early 1920s (pre-Cardenas), mestizaje was viewed

77 Other highlights of Cardenas’s presidency include the redistribution of land, the implementation of a credit system, and the nationalization of Mexico’s oil fields.
through a cultural lens espoused by José Vasconcelos. Vasconcelos was the first minister of education from 1921-1924 influencing the direction of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), the central agency overseeing education throughout Mexico (Cerda García 99). Indigenous peoples were perceived as belonging to primitive cultures, requiring access to Western cultural forms and learning Spanish. As Irmgard Rehaag notes, education in post-revolutionary Mexico operated under the idea that one nation should have one national language and culture; Indigenous languages were undervalued as mere dialects and were forbidden in schools (75). Under Cardenas, education reform mirrored a leftist politics. Stephen E. Lewis writes, “Under Cárdenas, indigenistas and educators also tackled economic and political matters. They used the rhetoric of class struggle to portray Indians as victims of a conniving mestizo bourgeoisie, the landed elite, the church, and foreign capitalists” (186). This rhetorical shift made the capitalist and religious systems (in other words, not the government) responsible for the “Indian Problem” whereas previously the “Indian Problem” was attributed to a perceived cultural inferiority.

The Marxist interpretation of the “Indian Problem” mirrors an indigenista turn to what anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán termed practical sociology. Practical sociology sought to assimilate Indigenous populations through a scientific and coordinated effort to understand all facets of native cultures (i.e. accessing Indigenous knowledges but not Indigenous perspectives). Practical sociology was “enfocado prioritariamente al mestizaje económico, étnico y cultural, sobre todo en áreas rurales y campesinas” (“focused primarily on economic, ethnic, and cultural mestizaje, especially in rural areas”) (emphasis mine, Cerda García 99). Aguirre Beltrán saw this practice-
driven sociological approach as a reflection of the missionaries approach to colonization (Aguirre Beltrán 234). He writes that the missionaries learned they could not just proselytize but that they needed to create a total system to impart new ways of being and new values. To create this total system, they realized that non-indigenous educators should identify with the community. The missionaries began to use visuals and performance and learned native languages to promote Christianization and assimilation (Aguirre Beltran 229). Aguirre Beltrán describes how the 1939 shift in educational reform to a practice-driven sociological approach relied on colonizing techniques inherited from the missionaries; he does not, however, condemn this approach as a form of neo-colonialism, which a contemporary reader may point out. Aguirre Beltran espoused a top-down, “scientific” approach to the study of Indigenous peoples in Mexico that nonetheless created an official space to discuss and assess the value of bilingual education. By 1939 there was a move to alphabetize Indigenous languages to achieve educational reform (Cerda Garcia 99).

It is under these circumstances that the Sociedad began publishing Neza. On its own terms, Neza constituted a medium for communicating research and educating the community in a more horizontal, grassroots way as opposed to the top-down approach espoused by indigenistas like Aguirre Beltrán. In writing about and (re) writing Zapotec oral traditions, for example, we see an example of Indigenous perspectives taking the lead in discussing Indigenous knowledges. Neza thus represents a particularly literary project of inscribing Zapotec oral traditions and connecting this body of knowledge

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78 Its further significance can be appreciated when considering that in pre-Columbian Mexico, literacy in Zapotec was reserved for the top 1% and 5% of the elite (Marcus 85).
through print media to the community’s contemporary concerns. Although the SEP’s efforts, and its corollary institutions like the Instituto Lingüístico de Verano (“Summer Linguistics Institute”), were directed towards primary education, Gloria Chacón’s forthcoming work, *Unsettling the Canon: The Rise of Mesoamerican Writers*, posits an important link between contemporary Mayan and Zapotec authors and these early efforts at bilingual education and the cultural mediators whose work made bilingual education possible. The writers of *Neza* did not go on to become Indigenous authors in the sense that Chacón’s work takes up, namely as writers who may choose in their works of fiction to deviate from the oral tradition. However, *Neza*’s writers did assume authorial roles as essayists, critics, and short story writers that led to the journal’s broad literary production and connection to the Isthmus pueblos.

**Henestrosa: An Indigenous Intellectual**

Henestrosa was an extraordinary contributor to *Neza*. As he recounts in the preface to the 1987 facsimile edition of *Neza*, he initiated the move to constitute the Sociedad and served as editor-in-chief of its flagship journal. His literary practice includes criticism, *recopilación* (“the writing and collecting of oral traditions”), translation and phonetics. In this section, I begin with a look at his biography to “claim” him as an Indigenous intellectual. I begin here because *Hombres* and “Retrato de mi Madre,” his most-widely read and anthologized texts, contribute to his public perception as a cosmopolitan Mexican intellectual. Through excavating his work in *Neza*, we can also gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for his tribal-centric work. As such, this section traces Henestrosa’s role as an Indigenous intellectual, a cultural mediator
who actively chose to stress his Indigenous agency and how travel, in particular, contributed to this intellectual formation. Henestrosa self-fashioned and practiced his identity as an Indigenous scholar through travel and writing. His contributions to Neza in particular affirm his committed stance as an Indigenous intellectual who equally claims Mexico and Spanish as his own. Traveling across tribal, transnational, and linguistic spaces, Henestrosa developed an intellectual identity as a Zapotec and Mexican intellectual.

Henestrosa was quite the cosmopolitan figure. As a scholar who was both modern and Indigenous, his literary and intellectual work points to a similar logic of cultural autonomy and nation-building. The indigenista impulse of the 1920s and 1930s no doubt created a climate in which Henestrosa (1906-2008) was compelled to travel across linguistic, ethnic, geographic, and geo-political borders in ways that anticipate the barriers and opportunities for contemporary Indigenous writers in Mexico. Henestrosa was born in Ixhuatán, Oaxaca in 1906. His mother was Zapotec and his father was Huave. His father died when he was a young child, leaving his mother to care for

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79 Through personal interviews with the author, Carla Zabreska notes that Henestrosa was impressed with Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book*, Leon Frobenius’s *The Black Decameron*, and especially the fourteen volume collection, *Las musas lejanas*, about myths and legends from Asia, the Middle East, and Europe (14). She quotes him: “After reading these books, I said to myself: ‘The legends and myths that I heard in my childhood are just like these,’ and I began the task of writing a book that would contain a part of what until that time had been preserved in Juchitán as an oral tradition” (Zabreska 14).

80 Henestrosa’s writing reveals an openness to discuss his Zapotec and Huave heritage, but as the body of his work affirms, Henestrosa directs his focus on the former. In Volume II, number 14 (July 1936) Henestrosa includes Spanish translations of a song and a letter in Huave; he reproduces the texts in the original Huave to show his readers the Spanish and Zapotec influences on the language. The Huaves, as Henestrosa notes before including the texts, live in the Isthmus but are neither Zapotec nor autochtonous to the
several children. The Mexican Revolution, beginning in 1910, brought unprecedented violence to the village. According to Henestrosa, his mother began to give away their money and animals, claiming that it was because she did not want someone to marry her for money. Henestrosa left Ixhuatán for Mexico City in 1922.  

In 1929, he published his first book, *Hombres*, a collection of stories from the Zapotec oral tradition. During this time, he worked on José Vasconcelos’s 1929 presidential campaign. Vasconcelos was also from Oaxaca, and helped Henestrosa begin his higher education in Mexico City by offering him a scholarship. Henestrosa also claimed that Vasconcelos helped him get *Hombres* published. Vasconcelos’s campaign failed, leaving Henestrosa disillusioned with Mexican politics. The regional affiliation and the shared enthusiasm for education and culture impressed upon Henestrosa a powerful belief in Vasconcelos’s message about the values of Western culture and mestizaje. From 1936-1938, Henestrosa was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and researched Zapotec language and history at UC Berkeley, the University of Chicago, and Tulane University. He was working at the Middle American Institute in Tulane when he wrote his most widely anthologized text, “Retrato de mi Madre.” Back in Mexico, Henestrosa became a journalist, a member of the Mexican Language Academy in 1964 (exclusive of his early participation in the Academy of Zapotec Language), and later became an elected official as a federal representative in the Chamber of Deputies and senator of Oaxaca. His biography provides

*Isthmus: “no son autóctonas del Istmo”* (6). On the same page, Henestrosa features a reproduction of “La Campana” from *Hombres*. “La Campana” is the story about a Zapotec/Huave rivalry regarding a church-bell.  

I consulted Reyes Haiducovich’s, *Henestorsa, hombre de un Siglo*, for an in-depth look at Henestrosa’s biography. His letter, “Retrato de mi Madre” only offers a limited account of his early childhood and adulthood.
an important touchstone to understand issues related to indigeneity, literacy, and literature in the era.

From the above cursory look at his biography, Henestrosa appears to embody the mestizo subject. He was bilingual, literate, a promoter of Vasconcelos’s cultural and political ideals, Spanish, and the Mexican nation-state. Debra Castillo and Stuart A. Day identify Henestrosa as a public intellectual, someone who is socially committed, “[reaches] out to a wide audience, [shares] their opinions and knowledge, and in questioning (and at times reinforcing) the status quo, provide[s] a critical stance that often influences the actions of the Mexican people and/or the government” (4). Castillo writes that Henestrosa played a major role in constructing a utopian image of Juchitán for the international imaginary (45). Castillo attributes this role to the “star-studded cast of visitors” he brought to the area, which included internationally renown figures such as Tina Modotti, Langston Hughes, Henri Cartier Bresson, and Antonin Artaud, in addition to Mexican artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo (45). At the same time, she implicitly attributes Henestrosa’s role in fashioning an international image of Juchitán to his indigeneity. She writes that he is the “perfectly assimilated Indian” and wittingly or unwittingly promoted an image of Juchitán as an example of the untouched Indigenous past that tantalized international and national communities (45). Castillo’s analysis makes clear that Henestrosa experienced a cultural bind: in writing about his own indigeneity and Zapotec oral traditions, he advanced and circulated an indigenista desire to access and assimilate the Indian.

The hard truth Castillo’s argument elucidates however is not the only version of Henestrosa’s intellectualism. Natividad Gutiérrez defines Indigenous intellectuals as
people who work to promote their indigenous cultures. She writes that their labor, “[involves] the use of his/her intellect…[he or she] has received a modern education, remains in contact with ‘modern intellectual culture’ and proposes solutions in a modern context. His/her activities deal with the theoretical, pragmatic recovery and reinforcement of his/her cultural and historical capital, and in attaining positions of leadership and authority” (288). In other words, an Indigenous intellectual serves as a cultural mediator and agent between a lived reality that is at once thoroughly modern and rooted in tradition. De la Cruz, as noted above, would describe the Indigenous intellectual’s task and the binniza’s task more generally as deciding and evaluating what to choose from modernity and what to conserve from tradition.82

Current research on Indigenous intellectuals of the colonial era offers insight into this tension of cultural mediation and agency. Elizabeth Hill Boone writes that the Tlanatinime, the Nahua men who helped Bernadino de Sahagun compile his studies of Nahua language and culture, had the task of “[making] sense of both the Spanish culture as it was adapted to the Americas and the indigenous culture that had evolved under Spanish domination, all within the reality of the bicultural, multilingual world of their times” (Boone 13). Gabriela Ramos and Yana Yannakakis argue that studies of the colonial era ought to move away from the domination versus resistance model which elides the complexity of daily, lived experience. As Boone writes of the colonial era “…ethnic and social pluralism is more than simply the indigenous people versus the

82 Henestrosa’s role as an Indigenous intellectual in Mexico is not unlike the intellectual mediator that Downing creates in The Mexican Earth. However, I note the layers of distance that inform Downing’s intellectual (rather than cultural) agenda: his narrator is American Indian not an Indigenous Mexican, and he is writing from an intellectual position in the North.
Spaniards but is also composed of a complex mosaic of individuals who themselves are culturally mixed and who pursue specific agendas according to local demands” (14). These scholars’ attention to the colonial era is particularly relevant in this context because of the mestizo/indio configuration that becomes the dominant racialized trope for understanding social relations in post-revolutionary Mexico. Henestrosa, more than identifying as Indigenous, would identify as Juchiteco- someone from Juchitán with claims to a history, land, and language tied to this area of the Isthmus. In this sense, Henestrosa would have insight into the “ethnic and social pluralism” undergirding the illusion of a homogenous Mexican nation-state. At the same time, it is evident that Henestrosa did not rule out working within official channels to pursue his specific agenda to promote the “local demands” of Juchitec and Oaxacan cultures.

Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (Nahua) offers a useful counterpoint to understand Henestrosa’s position as an Indigenous intellectual. Altamirano published *El Zarco* (1901), a novel with an Indigenous protagonist, Nicolás, who is described by and large in mestizo terms: he speaks Spanish, works in the town, and helps to fight off the bandits who threaten the region’s stability. Through the figure of Nicolás, Altamirano promotes an assimilated version of the indio - a non-threatening and productive mestizo. Although there is a project to reclaim Altamirano as an Indigenous writer, he nonetheless did not work to recover or reinforce Nahua culture in *El Zarco*. Through the novel, he assumes authority as an intellectual of Nahua heritage who contributes to theorizing Indigenous and mestizo relations. Joshua Lund argues that the crucial object of study is not

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83 See the introduction to Yolanda Matías- García’s book written by Natalio Hernandez. I would like to thank Gloria Chacón for insight into his work.
Altamirano’s biography but how Altamirano espouses a view that normalizes hierarchies as an inevitable outcome of history (46). Lund argues that it is a mistake to assume that Altamirano could have espoused a politics of Indigenous autonomy and resistance in a time when “indio” referred to a social condition (48-49). Altamirano’s *El Zarco* was about articulating hegemony, a feeling of nationness founded on consent to Liberal ideals of democracy and the citizen inherited from Europe (Lund 49-50).

Unlike Altamirano, Henestrosa writes after the Mexican Revolution, during a time of a cultural nationalism founded on the discourses of mestizaje and indigenismo that proposed a re-evaluation and admiration for the country’s Indigenous history and present. In this sense, “indio” was a social category understood in racialized terms. In an interview with Carla Zabreska, Henestrosa reflects on the initial publication of *Hombres* in 1929. He recounts:

> At the time, Mexican authors copied the styles of foreign writers, particularly the English and the French. And this bastard suddenly appears writing about the Indians. Where the hell did this upstart get off thinking he could talk about the Indians when everyone else [was] talking about Jean Cocteau, André Bretón, Jules Superville, the breaks with the past… my God! So my book was not well received by the literary world in vogue at the time but rather by men of science and the old-fashioned literati. (14)

Henestrosa touches upon an important problematic, revealing the “huella” (“trace”) that his time and space leaves on the oral tradition. First, we can note that Henestrosa claims he was not writing within the prevailing modernist paradigm- “the breaks with the past.” Rather, his work was recovering “the past.” As he notes, his work was celebrated because it fulfilled the desire for Indigenous literature and history, a desire that made no distinctions between literature written by Indigenous and non-native peoples. This bind is similar to the one described above about the representations of Henestrosa as an
intellectual. His work and by extension his perceived identity continually move between the “center” constituted by international and national indigenistas and indianists and the “periphery”- Zapotecs- at the same time that it redraws these sites to center Zapotec culture.

The publishing scene, an activity of the “center,” thus plays a major role in circulating the Zapotec literary tradition; the transit from the oral tradition to the written tradition in this period is cut across and mediated by different audiences with different goals. For example, José Luis Martínez republished sections from Hombres in the book Literatura Indígena Moderna (1942). Of the three authors in the collection, Henestrosa is the only Indigenous writer, which the editor notes. The other two authors, Antonio Mediz Bolio and Ermilio Abreu Gómez, have “piel blanca” (“white skin”) but “conservan rastros indígenas” (“conserve indigenous traces”) (Martínez 14). All three writers, he argues, elucidate the mystery of Indigenous communities; the non-native writers are particularly adept at capturing the nostalgic Maya. Over sixty years later, the introduction to the bilingual edition of Hombres, published in 2004, cites Antonio Mediz Bolio’s La tierra del faisán y del venado (1922) and Miguel Ángel Asturias’s Leyendas de Guatemala (1930) as comparable publications. Mediz Bolio, Abreu Gómez, and Asturias partake in an indigenista literary tradition as non-native writers writing about, in this context, Mayan oral traditions. These examples demonstrate that Henestrosa’s work was and is read within the frame of indigenista literature. Although Henestrosa thought highly of Western culture and literature as a universal heritage and chose to write in Spanish, he nonetheless was committed to promoting and reinforcing the literature and culture of the Isthmus. His work broke from a past that posited Indigenous peoples as illiterate and a
present that posited Indigenous peoples on their way to becoming mestizo. Thus the
indigenista literary tradition provided a receptive audience for the kind of work that
Henesrosa was doing: publishing oral traditions and working on Zapotec philology but it
does not fully account for the specificity of his tribal-centric approach to promote his
pueblo.

In “Retrato de Mi Madre,” Henestrosa’s widely anthologized text, he captures the
Indigenous intellectual’s dilemma of being a cultural mediator. The title of the letter
refers to a literal photographic image that Henestrosa took while in Ixhuatán between the
two academic years he was researching in the United States as a Guggenheim fellow.

Ruth Dworkin, a Jewish-American pianist to whom the letter is addressed, gave
Henestrosa the camera. The two had been dating during his year in Chicago. When he
was to return to Mexico for the summer, she gave him a camera and told him to take
photographs of his family for her. The printed letter is approximately nine pages long,
and the majority of those pages describe his mother, as the title suggests. We learn that
she was very beautiful, that she grieved for her first husband by walking at night calling
his name, gave away gifts and money as well as recited Spanish-language ballads at
weddings even though she did not speak Spanish. The last two pages represent an
Henestrosa that is continually bound-up with negotiating his identity as a scholar and as a
son. One night, his mother, Tina Man, asks Henestrosa what he thinks about his future.
He describes that on the one hand, he could stay in Ixhuatán. Afterall, there was still a
milpa and some animals. It would be a life of bravery, discipline, and suffering. On the
other hand, he writes, “O bien, quedaba el camino de México, de la Universidad, de la
Gloria” (“Or there was the road to Mexico City, to the University, to Glory”). Needless to
say, Henestrosa took the road to a university education. Whether this is the road to glory or not, Henestrosa is keenly aware of the suffering implicit in the latter choice he took. Describing his wait at the train stop to Mexico City with his mother, he describes how she gives him advice and brushes his hair with a little comb. He writes that she did not cry in front of him, but that he knew she cried that night. “Estoy seguro,” he writes, “porque yo me siento anclado, igual que una pequeña embarcación, a un río de llanto” (“I am sure because I feel anchored, just like a small boat, to a river of tears”). This is not a letter of confession wherein Henestrosa reveals the mother he has had to negate so as to become the modern scholar. She is the subject of the letter and the image, and she is significant because she is his mother. She connects him to the world he has had to leave behind in order to have access to becoming a modern scholar: his family, his home, his land, and to a certain point, his language.

The letter ends with Henestrosa imagining his mother’s daily routine. He imagines that she lives alone in Ixhuatán; she wakes up, sweeps the house, waters the garden, makes her breakfast, and walks throughout the village with her head held high. In the very last sentence, Henestrosa writes, “Cuando le preguntan por mí responde, como poniendo en duda el tamaño del mundo, que estoy en un lugar que nombran Berkeley, Chicago, Nueva Orleans. Y agrega: ‘Al saber si es verdad que existen esos lugares’” (“When people ask about me, as if putting the size of the world in doubt, she tells them that I’m in some place called Berkeley, Chicago, New Orleans adding, ‘To know if those places really do exist’”). In representing a witty, direct quote presumably uttered by his mother, Henestrosa imagines his mother is skeptical about these US cities because she is
an Indigenous woman living in a rural part of Oaxaca. Perhaps, “Retrato de mi Madre” is less about the son being anchored to his mother, and more about a son coming to understand that his mother already knows he must go where he needs to go. Through the imagined lack of familiarity with these transnational sites, Henestrosa acknowledges his privilege while drawing attention to its cost.

At the same time, the Sociedad recognizes that Henestrosa’s privilege to travel is necessary to meet the larger goals it is pursuing. In Volume II, number 13 (June 1936), the Sociedad includes a short announcement “Henestrosa nos deja” (“Henestrosa leaves us”) that captures the Sociedad’s pride in and expectations of Henestrosa. They begin, “ya todo istmeño sabe…” (“every istmeño now knows”) that Henestrosa has been awarded a scholarship to study in the U.S. (3). The Sociedad remarks that this scholarship represents a “justicia a uno de los nuestros” (“an act of justice done to one of our own”) by the Guggenheim Foundation (3). They claim this Fellowship as an act of justice because Henestrosa is being given the opportunity to study the Zapotec culture. They write, “En una palabra, Andrés Henestrosa va a redondear su cultura zapoteca en fuentes puras, que por una ironía de la historia se encuentran donde ya no es México” (“in a word, Andrés Henestrosa, will round out his Zapotec culture in pure sources because by some irony of history these are found where Mexico is not”) (3). The Sociedad completes the announcement with the expectation that Henestrosa will continue to speak about Zapotec “cosas” (“things”) (3).

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84 Debra Castillo insightfully interprets this passage as Henestrosa’s “ironic wink.” This wink works in two ways: Tina Man diffuses his pretentions and dismisses these intellectual circles of the north wile affirming her “strong sense of place”— her Istmeño pride (53).
In the next issue, the editorial staff reproduces a column, “Un zapoteca que busca el alma de su raza,” written by Enrique Liekens who was then editor of the journal *Izquierdas: Periódicos de Acción* (“Leftists: Periodical of Action”). The Sociedad’s farewell differs in tone from that of their “paisano y amigo” (“fellow countryman and friend”) in that Liekens stresses Henestrosa’s narrative as one of personal and racial uplift. The piece begins, “la raza conquista por el audaz ibero no ha muerto” (“the race, conquered by Iberian might, is not dead”). Similar to Guillermo Bonfil Batalla’s notion of a *México profundo* (“deep Mexico”) referring to the Indigenous Mexico underpinning the official Mexico, Liekens states that Henestrosa’s work inspires recognition of the “vida latente” (“latent life”) of a conquered race that persists and surprises. Like the Sociedad’s entry, Liekens describes how Henestrosa has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and will be conducting research in libraries across the United States. However, Liekens adds that Henestrosa will also travel to the Archivo de Indias in Seville, Spain (there is no evidence that Henestrosa made this trip). Liekens then delves into Henestrosa’s biography: that he is “de extracción genuinamente indígena” (“of genuine Indian extraction”) whose parents are “de raza pura Zapoteca de Juchitán” (“of pure Zapotec race from Juchitan”). However, as Henestrosa notes, his father was Huave and not Zapotec. According to Liekens, Henestrosa would have been destined to a monotonous and poor life in Ixhuatán- condemned to laboring the fields; the Revolution created chaos in the educational system, leaving Henestrosa without the appropriate education to meet his spiritual goals. This tone contrasts sharply with Henestrosa’s own description in “Retrato de mi Madre” that remaining in Ixhuatán would lead to a life.

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85 The article is published in Volume II, number 14 (July 1936).
of bravery, discipline, and suffering- values that he associates with Juchitecos generally. However, Henestrosa “hizo un esfuerzo supremo y rompió aquel cerco abandonando su pueblo natal y las montañas…” (“with supreme effort, broke the fence and abandoned his native land and mountains”) (Liekens 2). While studying for a law degree, Henestrosa realized that his “verdadera vocación” (“true vocation”) was in Literature and History and has since researched and written about the “alma y la cultura de su Raza” (“soul and culture of his Race”) (Liekens 4). He is an “antorcha que hace luz sobre el pasado brillante de su pueblo, para proyectarlo, como una esperanza salvadora, sobre su presente de abandono” (“torch, lighting the brilliant past of his pueblo to project it on its present, marked by abandon, like a saving hope”) (Liekens 4).

The two accounts narrating Henestrosa’s departure both share a sense of joy and pride that someone from their own community has been given the opportunity to continue researching and writing about Zapotec culture. In this sense, the Guggenheim Foundation as an institutional and transnational organization provides the means for Henestrosa’s travel. The Sociedad and Liekens both place blame on Mexico’s educational system for creating a context in which Henestrosa must leave his village and country behind. On the one hand, Liekens denounces Henestrosa’s primary education, devaluing a rural life. On the other hand, the Sociedad points out the irony that Henestrosa must leave for the North to round out his Zapotec studies. What is at stake in these different accounts is how Henestrosa gets coded as a scholar and how his community values his intellectual contributions. The Sociedad’s emphasis on the scholarship as act of justice represents Henestrosa’s work as having the ability to rectify a history of wrongdoing and bring knowledge of Zapotec history to the community. They write, “Ojalá que cuando torne el
amigo, en otro libro nos hable de cosas Zapotecas. Los hombres que dispersó la danza se reunirán otra vez para escuchar su palabra” (“hopefully when our friend returns, he will talk to us about Zapotec things in another book. Los hombres que dispersó la danza will reunite once again to hear his words”) (3). The Sociedad conceives of his work as part of the Zapotec oral tradition: his book would talk about Zapotec things and reunite the ancestors to hear his words: his work links the community’s past to the present. In contrast, Liekens’ account emphasizes Henestrosa’s personal biography as a narrative of progress. Liekens uses a rhetoric that represents Henestrosa in heroic terms: he defeated all the odds, and his work shines a light of hope on his community. Liekens ascribes Henestrosa’s “supreme desire” to return Mitla (Zapotec) and Palenque (Yucatek Maya) to their former glory (4). In the former, Henestrosa leaves to come back whereas in the latter, Henestrosa leaves only to come back through his work, which appears to remain wedded to the past. To be clear, the differences in Liekens’ version may be attributable to a difference in audience. It may be the case that Liekens simplifies Henestrosa’s Indigenous background, includes Mayan history, and emphasizes the intellectual hero to appeal to a leftist, indigenista readership. Nonetheless, the differences reveal an important tension by which Henestrosa is either remembered as part of the Zapotec community or as an assimilated intellectual who writes about the Zapotec community, a tension that still resonates today. Henestrosa in “Retrato de mi madre,” the Sociedad, and Liekens represent contrasting accounts of the Indigenous intellectual.
Under Henestrosa’s leadership in particular, *Neza* becomes an important space to circulate knowledge that was historically confined to the university and library. In the first year, *Neza* consisted of a total of nine issues. Henestrosa was the editor for numbers one, two, three, and nine. He takes over the position as editor for Volume I, number 9 through Volume II, number 13. One feature of Henestrosa’s leadership is the column, “Guía del Lector” (“A Reader’s Guide”), which imaginatively conceives of a readership in travel. The title can signify that the writer (Henestrosa) is the reader’s guide; it can also refer to the column in a reflexive way, that the column itself is a guide/map/key of literature and history. The column is featured in six issues of *Neza*’s second year, overlapping with three issues under the direction of Alfa Ríos Pineda as editor. The column’s significance lies in its project to build and circulate an archive of texts about the Isthmus and speaks to Henestrosa’s intellectual and cultural approach to promoting Zapotec literacy and literacy of Western literary culture- to bring the experience of travel through research to the Isthmus community. I trace several entries below that best exemplify Henestrosa’s intellectual and research driven approach to building and circulating the archive.

In the first column, Henestrosa provides a list of books- a map so to speak- that can be found in the Biblioteca Nacional (“National Library”) and are about the history of Oaxaca. In the prose section featured with the list, Henestrosa offers two reasons for such

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86 Adolfo Gurrión was the editor for the other five issues. Gurrión features the column when he takes over the journal in the fourth issue, but drops it for the subsequent four issues.

87 Ríos Pineda and Henestrosa would later marry.
a selection of texts: (1) that Juchitecos need to know about themselves and (2) librarians
might not know about the texts to help students. He expresses this conundrum as follows:

Antes de aprender a moverme en las bibliotecas, muchas veces abandoné
el propósito de leer algún texto, consultar una fuente, dada la dificultad de
encontrar un bibliotecario con la suficiente preparación y buena voluntad
para guiarme en este laberinto que es la historia de México. Lo que alguno
de ellos llegan a dominar es la colocación de los libros en los anaqueles;
de tal manera que si un estudiante no sabe de antemano el autor que
pretende consultar, después de perder el tiempo, perderá el entusiasmo y
recorrerá a los libros más inmediatos y por lo mismo más elementales
(Before learning how to move in the libraries, there were many times
when I abandoned my intention to read a book or consult a source, given
the difficulty of finding a librarian with the sufficient preparation and
good will to help guide me in this labyrinth that is Mexican history. What
some of the librarians master is how to shelve books in the stacks; because
of this, if a student does not know beforehand the author they seek to
consult, they will lose time. They will also lose enthusiasm and turn to the
books in their vicinity which also happen to be the most elementary). (2)

Henestrosa touches upon an important problematic: while there are texts available about
the written history of Oaxaca and Indigenous history of Mexico, these texts are largely
inaccessible. For one, students may be as unfamiliar with the texts as the librarians
themselves. Second, the books are physically stored away, preventing students from
“stumbling” across new books in the stacks that might advance their learning. In contrast,
books that students would find accessible, as Henestrosa notes, offer simplistic accounts
of Mexican and Oaxacan history. For Henestrosa, Oaxacan and Zapotec history is also
Mexican history; it is a labyrinth that requires mastery of the libraries, which his column
suggests takes practice and patience to work through. His use of the verb “to move”
signals this learned practice and emphasizes mobility and interaction with and within the
space. Henestrosa finishes the prose introduction by inviting students to consult
additional sources in his home. The archive Henestrosa builds in this first column
includes: Leopoldo Bates’s *Explorations of Monte Albán* (1902), Francisco Belmar’s *Breve reseña histórica y geográfica del estado de Oaxaca* (1901) and his *Lenguas indígenas de México* (1905), Alfonso Caso’s *Las estelas zapotecas* (1928), and José Antonio Gay’s *Historia de Oaxaca* (1882) among several others.

As the first entry of “Guía del Lector,” it is significant that Henestrosa seeks to immediately address a problem of access to knowledge. Its message is one of sharing the practical and literary insight that Henestrosa has gained through first-hand experience and transforms Henestrosa into a librarian and tour guide. In this capacity, Henestrosa begins to construct an archive of important works about Zapotec and Oaxacan history, and *Neza* is similarly included in this process of construction. This archive, conceived of in metaphorical and material terms, connects Zapotec written and oral traditions and it is composed of the tensions and imbrications of Zapotec and “official” writing about Mexico. Subsequent entries further reveal this process of construction.

In the second entry featured in Volume I, number 2 (July 1935) Henestrosa includes a section from what he might consider essential reading: José Vasconcelos’s recently published *Ulises criollo*. In this section, Vasconcelos recounts his contact with a Juchitec native (a bank agent) and the spectacular sights of the religious fiestas, dances, markets, and women. He describes the women’s bare arms and stomachs and erect nipples, offering a sexualized representation of Isthmus women that continues into the contemporary era.\(^8\) When considering the discourses of indigenismo and mestizaje, the

\(^8\) The sexualized representation of Isthmus women continues to this day. Male writers like Henestrosa celebrate female sexuality without accounting for the entrenched sexism their own discourse replicates. Women writers from the region are, however, writing back.
fragment stands out for the multiple ways of reading Vasconcelos’s insistence on mestizaje. In the first instance, he describes Tehuantepec as conserving its “carácter autóctono, más bien criollo” (“autochthonous character, more precisely its mixed character”) (2). Later, he describes the Juchiteco as “nativo, pero de origen europea” (“native but of European origin”), which the family denounces (2). He describes the family as having toasted skin and blue eyes; the women, with their “cruza indígena” (“indigenous blood”) are, according to Vasconcelos, like languid statues in motion who are structurally the most beautiful and sensual type of mestizos in America. These women, he notes, only speak their Indigenous language. Vasconcelos praises the biological mestizaje of the Juchitec family, holding the family and the people in the region up as exemplars of beauty and sensuality. However, he does so by undermining the region’s and family’s claims to an Indigenous identity at the syntactic level: autochtonous, more precisely criollo; native, but with European ancestry. He further reduces the women to statues and types that place emphasis on breeding for show, much like breeding livestock.

While it is difficult to imagine what Henestrosa may have wanted his readers to take away from the excerpt, we can assume that the excerpt may have spoken to Henestrosa’s pride in the beauty and sensuality of the region, as well as pride in the representation of the Juchiteco’s insistence on his Indigenous identity. One indication of what this excerpt might have meant to Henestrosa can be found in the article “La

89 He writes, “no hay entre los mestizos de América tipos estructuralmente más hermosos y sensuales” (“amongst the mestizos of America, there is no other type as beautiful or sensual structurally”) (2).

90 As noted in the introduction, Vasconcelos’s embrace of the mestizo trope is a strategy of contesting European and Anglo-American ideas about the superiority of racial purity.
Zapotequización,” written by Bernabe Morales Henestrosa, which is included in the same issue. In this article, Morales Henestrosa represents a fiercely regional interpretation of Juchitecos. He attributes to Juchitecos a disdain and pity for the foreigner “como si hubiera de encontrarle menos calidad, más pobreza de espíritu” (“as if the Juchiteco found in the foreigner less quality and more poverty of the spirit”) (5). Bernabe Morales claims that this attitude can be traced to a racial essence inherited from the ancient Zapotecs who thought of themselves as the first peoples of the land.  

Undoubtedly, Bernabe Morales launches problematic claims that rely on an understanding of race as synonymous with identity and culture but that were, in his time, assumed valid. Yet, he proposes the idea of “Zapotequización” that at once dismantles this understanding of his race. The larger point he makes in the article is that Juchitán indigenizes, or rather, Zapotecizes, the other. He defines the process as “un movimineto absorvente que se opera incorporando al extranjero al molde étnico zapoteco, en alguno o en todos sus caracteres” (“an absorbing movement that incorporates the foreigner to the zapotec mold in either one or all of their characteristics”) (5). Once this process is set in motion, he claims it can be difficult to identify the Indigenous Juchiteco from the zapotecized one (5). Zapotequización, in the end, offers a powerful alternative to the mestizaje propounded by Vasconcelos in the above excerpt. For Vasconcelos, mixture invariably leads to a mestizo, American culture even if the mestizo values their Indigenous heritage. This mestizaje is also figured in metaphors of blood. For Bernabe Morales, a foreigner (and we might add the mestizo) can become Zapoteco: they can live in Juchitán where

91 Roberto Zarate Morán documents that the Zapotecs arrived in the Isthmus from the Central Valleys of Oaxaca around 1250 A.D., displacing the Mixes and Zoques (146).
they will learn the language and traditions. This understanding of mestizaje is framed in a more cultural sense. Bernabe Morales contributes another understanding of mestizaje to the conversation that dismantles the assumption that mixture de-indigenizes. When juxtaposed together in Neza, these two articles play out the tension between mestizaje and indigeneity occurring at the broader literary level. While Ulises criollo now forms part of the Mexican literary canon, we can assume that as recently published material in Henestrosa’s day, Henestrosa may have sought to highlight its reference to the Isthmus. While on the one hand, Ulises criollo promotes its contemporary understanding that mestizaje is by nature “better,” through juxtaposition, Henestrosa provides Bernabe Morales’s alternative voice to this discussion. Bernabe Morales re-directs mestizaje to demonstrate that mixture can lead to indigeneity.

The fourth column of “Guía del lector” was featured under Gurrion’s tenure and may have been selected before the transition between editors. This column features an excerpt from El Rey Cosijoeza y su Familia by Manuel Martínez Gracida. Cosijoeza was the Zapotec king at a time of Aztec incursion into the area in the last years of the fifteenth century. To avoid war, Cosijoeza married Coyolicaltzin, the Aztec king’s daughter. The excerpt emphasizes the couple’s love for each other and enumerates their heirs. By including this excerpt, the editors seek to celebrate a history of Zapotec resistance and to include Neza within this narrative. Their journal, through its form and content, can thus be conceived of as a grassroots form of resistance to the “center” (Mexico City) as the only historical source for nation-building. In their Indigenous afterlife of Martínez Gracida’s text, the editors represent Indigenous alliances through marriage and love. This

92 This article was featured in Volume I, number 4 (September 1936).
excerpt has the added significance of demonstrating the archive’s material circulation because Henestrosa included Martínez Gracida’s text in his first entry of “Guía del Lector.” The editors self-consciously promote literacy in Zapotec history and literature and share access to these texts with their readers. We can note how the editors promote Zapotec cultural autonomy within the nation-state framework of Mexican history. With the focus on marriage and love, the excerpt elides Aztec colonization and celebrates Zapotec resistance and power. John Tutino writes that the Aztecs sought to collect tributes in the region and secure cacao trade routes. Although the Isthmus Zapotecs “never fully ‘[defeated]’ the Mexica armies, they resisted militarily and negotiated the dynastic marriage; this arrangement gave the Mexicas “free passage across the Isthmus while preserving Zapotec lordship over the peoples of the region in exchange for recognition of ultimate Mexican lordship” (Tutino 44). Tutino’s research points to Zapotec deliberation and decision-making with the marriage representing a form of mediation and power sharing. 93

When Henestrosa returns as editor in Volume I, number 9 (February 1936), he begins to use the pseudonym Marcelo Man and transforms the format of “Guía del Lector” to include annotated bibliographies of texts. 94 He claims that this approach to the column is intended to meet Neza’s highest goal of “[siendo] útil a los paisanos” (“being useful to the people”) but the new format also allows Henestrosa to develop ideas and include contributions of his own (5). In this ninth issue, he includes a summary,

93 I intentionally use the two words, deliberation and decision-making to draw from Robert Warrior’s process-centered understanding of sovereignty.
94 Henestrosa combines the name of a brother (Marcelo) and his mother’s maiden name (Man).
embellished with his flowery prose, of Rafael F. Múñoz’s *Santa Anna. El que todo lo ganó y todo lo perdió* (1936). He notes that he begins with a biography because it is a genre, “que está educando a la juventud actual. Y que por contener la historia, la novela, el ensayo define el ritmo del tiempo que vivimos” (“that is educating today’s youth. And because it contains history, the novel, and the essay, biography defines the rhythm of the time in which we live”) (5). Henestrosa acts as a literary critic once again in the tenth issue, the first issue of Volume II (March 1936). In this issue, Henestrosa meditates on the disconnect between poetry and reality, describing Tehuantepec to make his point. For Henestrosa, Tehuantepec, in all of its tropical splendor, represents a reality of Mexico that writers ought to turn to for study and inspiration rather than to external influences. In this sense, Henestrosa reflects the position taken by Mexican modern artists discussed in chapter one who posited looking to Mexico for inspiration. Unlike the modern artists who would turn to a new, Indigenous and nationalist iconography, Henestrosa leaves the issue of language ambiguous. Is he making a claim about content or about language itself? He observes, in a move that blends the brilliance of life, fruit, and the market women, that poets write about the women in a language they do not understand. He stops here, noting the opposition between poetry and reality and positing Tehuantepec as “una de las fuentes de las que saldrá la potencia del México nuevo” (“one of the founts from which will emerge the new Mexico”) (3). Henestrosa leaves what language he refers to unresolved, particularly because the market women are, presumably, bilingual in Zapotec and Spanish. Does he mean that poetry (literature) ought to be written in Spanish, Zapotec, or bilingually so that even market women can access this body of work?
In Volume II, number 12 (May 1936) Henestrosa includes four poems in Zapotec that he translated from José Antonio Gay’s *Historia de Oaxaca*—another text featured in the initial entry. This entry captures Henestrosa’s work as a translator and participant in an ongoing conversation to phoneticize and revive Zapotec. The poems he translates were written in Zapotec by missionaries in the sixteenth century to honor the Virgen Mary (Henestrosa 6). Henestrosa describes the difficulty of translating the poems (1) because the language has undergone many changes since the Conquest and (2) because the missionaries themselves were transcribing a language with which they had only recently come into contact (6). He claims that he could only fully translate some of the poems, but includes them in the issue so that others could put their translation skills to the test and that their contemporary Zapotec might also gain new words (6). The second half of the article consists of Henestrosa citing passages about Zapotec philology from *El Tonalamatl Zapoteco* and dismantling the authors’ (Wilfrido Cruz’s) claims. For example, Cruz claims that throughout Oaxaca, Zapotecs use a modified Spanish word for rabbit. Henestrosa counters the claim by pointing out that there are at least three versions in Zapotec for rabbit: *lexu*, *lempa*, and *bé-la-xa-guixi*. In this move, Henestrosa promotes Zapotec as a living language. Henestrosa includes this dialogue as an example of sharing ideas about Zapotec philology; afterall, in Volume I, number 13 (June 1936) when he addresses the word “Sandunga” he writes: “Quiero, sin querella, sin deseo de herir a nadie, sino porque ayuda más a su patria el que le dice la verdad, derribar la leyenda del

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95 Similar moves to audience participation can be seen throughout *Neza*. One such example is its competition in translation. For example, the editors include expressions in Zapotec at the bottom of page one in one issue and print the best translation in the next issue.
origen zapoteco sostenido por Maqueo” (I want to debunk Maqueo’s support for the legend about the Zapotec origin of the word without quarrel, with no desire to hurt feelings, but because he who tells the truth helps his patria more) (3). This entry demonstrates Henestrosa’s work at translation and in philology and clearly speaks to his sense that Zapotec is a spoken and living language that belongs to a “patria.” His discussion with Cruz, represented in a back and forth between direct quotes and commentary, points to the way that the Zapotec community was engaged in a process of studying, reviving, and broadening the language. As the next section shows, however, there is an undercurrent of rivalry between Henestrosa and Cruz that unfolds in *Neza*.

*Neza* and *Los hombres que dispersó la danza*

Throughout the contents of *Neza*, there are a total of six reproductions from Henestrosa’s *Hombres*. These reproductions follow from the publicity of a contemporary debate about Henestrosa’s work and the oral tradition, which provides evidence of the text’s mestizo and isthmus readerships. In this section, I examine the nature of this debate, which revolves around the question of authorship. I conclude the section with an example of how stories in the oral tradition are then transformed to create new stories and texts, a process that broadens while further connecting the oral and written traditions. What we see in this process of enlargement is the making of transindigenous connections across time and space through *Neza* that create Indigenous afterlives for the stories.

In Volume II, number 9 (February 1936), the editorial staff included the text, “De la tradición oral” written by Hector Pérez Martínez for *El Nacional*. In “De la tradición oral,” Pérez Martínez describes that Wilfrido C. Cruz (a Juchiteco himself) claimed
Henestrosa plagiarized “Los Binigulaza,” a story about the ancestors. Pérez Martínez defends Henestrosa’s work in three ways: first, he identifies Henestrosa as Juchiteco, thus staking out Henestrosa’s Indigenous identity; second- and without elaboration- he identifies how Henestrosa’s indigeneity produced a profound Indigenous mentality that permeates the writing and explains that the non-native reader (like himself) often recognizes this wisdom only as folklore (1). Pérez Martínez’s third premise draws out a contradiction in Cruz’s argument to posit that the oral tradition belongs to the community not to a single author. Cruz wrote: “De niños, los que nacimos en aquella comarca oaxaqueña, escuchamos [estas palabras] de labios de nuestros abuelos…” (“as children, those of us who were born in that area of Oaxaca, heard those words from our grandparents’ lips”) (Pérez Martínez 5). Pérez Martínez observes that if Cruz makes a claim to the Zapotec oral tradition because he heard stories as a child, then the same reasoning can be extended to Henestrosa and his generation (5). Wisdom and folklore, he writes “se tornan en patrimonio común y multiple, imposible de patentar y expresar en fórmulas personales” (“become a common and multiple patrimony, impossible to patent and express in personal formulas”) (emphasis mine 1).

The publication of Pérez Martínez’s “De la tradición oral” in Neza was a last minute decision according to an endnote from the managing editor. In the same endnote, the copy editor, Jeremías López Chiñas makes clear that Henestrosa played no part in coming to this last minute decision, a smart move considering that Pérez Martínez claims that Henestrosa’s version is better than Cruz’s. More importantly, this move signals a communal decision-making process because Henestrosa is put at the center of a

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96 Pérez Martínez’s entry was published Saturday, February 29, 1936.
debate about the oral tradition. Underpinning their decision is the unanimous “sentir de los paisanos” (“feeling of the countrymen”) that Pérez Martínez’s thesis is valid: it is impossible to claim the oral tradition as one’s own. López Chiñas concludes: “El interés colectivo de que las cosas estén en su sitio, tiene para nosotros mayor valor que el individual” (“the collective interest being that things should be in their place, has more value for us than the individual”) (5). It is in the collective’s interest to value and practice the oral tradition as a commons, in other words, as cultural resources available to all within the community. López Chiñas’s decision to print Pérez Martínez’s article is one way that the community corrected a potentially harmful understanding of the oral tradition as texts reserved for their individual author.

Several issues later in Volume II, number 13, we see a powerful affirmation of recopilación- the act of writing down the oral tradition. Samuel Reyes Vera dedicates his article, “Chivaguela,” to Henestrosa. He cites the following epigraph that Henestrosa signed in his copy of Hombres: “Para Samuel Reyes Vera, con la esperanza de que agregue una leyenda más a este intento de libro que es Los hombres que dispersó la danza” (“To Samuel Reyes Vera, with the hope that you will add another legend to this attempt of a book that is Los hombres que dispersó la danza”) (Reyes Vera 1). Chivaguela, as Reyes Vera recounts, is in the sierras- the mountainous region of Oaxaca. In this way, he is adding a leyenda “que sin ser del Istmo, es Zapotec” (“that is not from the Isthmus but is Zapotec nonetheless”) (1). In this example, the Spanish language supports this transindigenous move: Zapotec from the sierra and from the isthmus are both part of the broader Zapotec language groups, but are distinct languages, with their own alphabets and dialects (de la Cruz 17). Henestrosa’s epigraph, much like the one
with which this dissertation begins, sets off a chain of connections. Reyes Vera shares a legend from the Zapotec oral tradition of the sierras with the Isthmus community, drawing attention to their shared Zapotec “roots” despite the two community’s different histories of writing. We also see in the epigraph how Henestrosa’s presence across time and space through handwriting and the written word inspires the growth of language and story-telling.

After this initial debate, Neza begins to feature several stories from Hombres alongside work by Wilfrido C. Cruz. The front pages of the subsequent two numbers (Volume II, numbers 10 and 11), set the two writers’ texts side by side. Visually, this format may appear confrontational, but it serves as a powerful conciliatory move: both writers are valued and their work ought to circulate in the community. In number ten, the staff includes a fragment from Cruz’s El Tonalamatl Zapoteco (1935). Set alongside this text is Henestrosa’s version of “Los Binigulaza,” now represented orthographically as “Vini-Gundah-Zaa.” The issue features two other selections from Hombres: “El lago de Santa Teresa” (described below) and “Del pez que cenó el apóstol.”97 The format is repeated in Volume II, number 11 with Cruz’s version of “Los Binigulaza” and Henestrosa’s version of “La lluvia” from Hombres.

“Los Binigulaza” recounts Zapotec origin stories thus framing an important entry point into the Zapotec oral tradition. In their projects of recopilación, Cruz’s and Henestrosa’s versions differ in style and emphasis. “Los Binigulaza” is not composed as a coherent narrative, but rather, as a series of interpretations that respond to distinct

97 In “El pez que cenó el apóstol,” (featured in Volume II, number 15) Henestrosa tells the story of the benda gudó apostol-a small fish found in the markets of Tehuantepec and Juchitán.
pronunciations of the word “Binigulaza” and their corresponding philological meanings.

Henestrosa’s version begins by acknowledging this linguistic and literary porosity. It reads:

Se cuenta en el Istmo de Tehuantepec, con el nombre de viniguláaza, la leyenda más vieja de la tradición zapoteca. Unida a la historia de nuestro orígen, ha llegado hasta aquí, después de muchas vueltas, incompleta, borrosa; y de trecho en trecho, brinca sobre vacíos. Y entonces cuando se pierde su rastro, y hay que revolver la tradición, fracturar la palabra, subir y bajar el acento para hallarla. Y se la encuentra con una huella nueva, ya veces, en cada rumbo de la misma época, distinta (On the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the oldest legend in the Zapotec oral tradition is known as binigulaza. Together with the story recounting the origins of the Zapotec people, it has come down to us after a long itinerary-incomplete, blurry and, from time to time, leaping across chasms. Then all traces of it disappear, and one must jolt the tradition, fracture the word, move the accent back and forth in order to find it. And it is discovered bearing new features, often differing from place to place within a same period). 98 (45)

When “fracturing the word,” stories emerge. In one instance, of fracture Vini (gente) and guláa (people who lived a long time ago), the viniguláaza are represented as the large, ugly, first peoples. A god destroyed them because of their disobedience. In times of flooding, stones or plates float down the river, which serve as remnants of their presence. The same term also refers to how the vinigulaza can refer to a select number of the population consisting of warriors, priests, magi, and divinators whose task it was to help the people through penance and self-sacrifice. In their old age, the vinigulaza would transform into animals and make fun of or harm their victims. In a third instance, with gu-láaza meaning “the first root,” Zapotecs identify themselves as descendants from trees, born from the roots of trees. In another instance, the formation of Gúla/Góla (elder)
and *zaa* (clouds) refers to the people from the clouds who descended from the heavens as large, colorful birds.

Henestrosa’s version, however, builds upon a play in sound: *Bini-gundah-zaa* and *danza* (dance). He supports this aural play with philological evidence; *zaa* also means music. In *Hombres*, Henestrosa combines *viniguláaza*, pronounced as *vini-gu-lá-záa* “el viento que se dispersó o que chocó con otro” (“the wind that dispersed itself or crashed with another”) with the second meaning of *zaa* to create the story of men who were separated by the dance (4). The story goes that the Zapotec people know that resisting the Spanish would be impossible. Thus, they held funerary ceremonies, dancing and mourning before fleeing to the mountains and into rivers, where some Zapotecs were transformed into fish. Those who remained behind became slaves of the Spanish.

In Cruz’s written account, the same philological underpinnings and stories are addressed. However, Cruz begins with a look at archeology as a field. He writes, “Ni Burgos, ni Córdova, ni Gay, nos han hablado de los *Binigulaza*. Su tradición es más conocido en el Istmo de Tehuantepec que en cualquiera otra region del estado; el Istmo, cuyos productos mitológicos en su inmensa mayoría permanecen ignorados por los hombres que se especializan en el estudio de asuntos arqueológicos e históricos del país” (“Neither Burgos, nor Cordova, nor Gay, have spoken to us about the *Binigulaza*. Their tradition is most widely known in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec than in any other region of the state; the Isthmus, whose immense mythological products remain ignored by the men who specialize in archeological and historical studies of the country”) (1). For Cruz, the oral tradition is a source of investigation that can enrich archeological and historical studies of Mexico. He cites historians of the colonial era and more contemporary scholars
who have ignored Indigenous stories (and thus knowledges). As he recounts the different Zapotec origin stories, Cruz emphasizes vini-gu-lá-záa – “el viento que se dispersó o que chocó con otro” (“the wind that dispersed itself or crashed with another”). Rather than *zza* as dance, however, he focuses on *zza* as clouds. He notes that during the conquest *zza* gained another meaning- “Manteca” (“lard”). In this way, his account stresses how those left behind after the dispersal were of inferior quality. He writes, “Y dice la tradición que muertos, desaparecidos o metamorfoseados los Binigula, de la gran nación de los Záas, solo quedaron los débiles, los pusilánimes que más tarde fueron los esclavos del Conquistador” (“and the tradition goes that of the dead, lost, or transformed of the Binigula, of the great nation of the Zaas, only the weak, the pusillanimous who later became the Conqueror’s slaves remained”) (emphasis mine 6).

The two written versions both offer a rich look into the oldest story from the Zapotec oral tradition- how the Zapotecs came to identify their ancestors to explain who they are as a “nation.” Henestrosa’s project however was largely an aesthetic one, leading some like Hector Pérez Martínez to claim that his version is better. Before the debate about plagiarism, Henestrosa wrote in Volume I, number 7 (December 1935) that he had heard the story of “Los Binigulaza” “…una noche en su [Cruz’s] casa de Mesones; la leyenda escrita la conocí después de escrita la mía sin emoción ni criterio erudito, sino como antecedentes para elaborar la interpretación personal” (“one night at Cruz’s house of the Mesones; the written legend I learned about only after writing my own, which I wrote without emotion or an erudite agenda, rather with the intention to elaborate a personal interpretation”) (6). He claims: “No me interesó cuando escribí mi libro la verdad histórica de la leyenda, sino su verdad poética que vale más” (“I wasn’t interested
in the historical truth of the legend only its poetic truth, which matters more") (6). It is evident from Cruz’s version that he was interested in history: how historians overlooked the Zapotec oral tradition and how the oral tradition can enrich the fields of archeology and history. His prose, less poetic, is directed at a like-minded audience: those who understand myth as a source of scientific investigation. Henestrosa’s version appeals to a literary sensibility, reflecting his own preference for literature as a window into the human spirit. At the same time, Henestrosa’s version emphasizes Zapotec survivance in a more positive way. While Cruz emphasizes the survivors of a once great people, Henestrosa ends his version with a look at contemporary ritual. Henestrosa observes that at the weddings of those who are most poor, those closest to the old ways, the bride and groom dance to a slow song while the guests break plates. The dance symbolizes the bride’s separation from her father’s home. In this account, Henestrosa updates the oral tradition, linking the past and an understanding of the past to a contemporary practice of those who have remained and maintain the old ways.

The debate about plagiarism is a unique feature of the transit from the oral to the written. Although Cruz sought to claim authorship over “Los Binigulaza,” it is clear that both authors contributed in unique ways to a body of criticism around the story. Indeed, the story itself changes in time because of this body of criticism produced in the oral tradition. For example, while “Los Binigulaza” is the oldest story in the Zapotec oral tradition, the Conquest adds a major trace: adding new meanings to understand the ancestors and their connection to the present. After the matter is settled that the oral tradition is open to all, Neza begins to feature more of Henestrosa’s work from Hombres. While other authors also feature their written versions of stories, Henestrosa’s work is
particularly valued for the poetic precedence it set - it sought to make the oral tradition beautiful in written form.

In five of the six re-published stories (including *Vini-Gundah-Zaa*), Christianity is drawn upon for its explanatory power about the natural world. Because these stories focus on water and the ocean, they also reveal traces of the *binigulazaa* - linking Christian and ancient Zapotec understandings of the land and their relationship to it. For example, in “El Lago de Santa Teresa,” Henestrosa recounts a story in which God sent Saint Teresa to form a city for the people. Saint Teresa observes the murder of one of the few good people in the region, and God decides to flood the region. Saint Teresa, however, disagrees with God’s plan and moves the mountains, forming the lake so as to protect the people. In this Zapotec version of the flood, we see a rebel saint who actively disobeys God’s plans to save the Zapotecs. “Los Binigulazaa” provides an important framework to understand this otherwise Christianized account. The Christian God is not unlike the God who killed the original *binigulazaa* - the large, ugly ancestors - in a flood. This time, these *binigulazaa* are protected by yet another *binigulazaa*. Saint Theresa functions as a *binigulazaa* - she is like the warriors and priests who do penance or sacrifice themselves for the people (saints are considered intermediators in the popular, Latino-Catholic imaginary). She disobeys God’s orders with the potential to incur his wrath because she wants to save the people. Even if they are wicked, she chooses redemption over punishment - an alternative account to what happened to the large, ugly men.

The publication of “Mudubina y Extagabeñe,” featured in Volume II, number 20 (January 1937) occurs outside of the Henestrosa and Cruz exchange but is a useful example of the interconnectedness of the oral and written traditions. The story is one of
the six re-published stories from Henestrosa’s *Hombres* and is a seemingly simply story. Steeped in sexual and reproductive overtones, it recounts how water lilies became aquatic; at the same time, the story offers an allegory of the oral tradition. The story of Mudubina and Extagabeñe is a tragic love story, “una dolorosa historia de amor,” because the water lilies do not know that they bloom at different times of the day (Henestrosa 3). Extagabeñe, the male, day-blooming flower, falls in love with Mudubina, the night-blooming flower. Because it is day-time, Extagabeñe interprets her closed blossoms as a sign of her virginity rather than as part of her “nature.” He awaits her response about whether or not she reciprocates the feeling. Mudubina, however, remains silent because she is asleep. In the text, this silence opens up a space for bilingual word play. Henestrosa writes that she is “muda,” the Spanish word for “silent,” which plays on the Zapotec word “mudu” meaning button. As night descends, Extagabeñe offers his final words of love and dies. Mudubina, not realizing that Extagabeñe is dead, replies with a resounding yes. Henestrosa writes that her yes resounded throughout the mountain in a big wave. Roberto Tejada translates the wave metaphorically, writing that Mudubina’s yes “moved through the mountain like a giant wave” (*H* 67). In the Spanish, the metaphor is not so clear. Henestrosa writes, “Y la respuesta en una onda gigante se propagó por el monte” (“and the response multiplied [extended and dilated] throughout the mountain in a big wave”) (*H* 67 and *Neza* 3). While Mudubina mourns his body, the area begins to flood, enclosing the flowers in a lake of water and tears.

Like “El Lago de Santa Teresa,” the story of Mudubina and Extagabeñe refers to the- or at the very least- a flood. Henestrosa refers to the flood that drowns the water lilies as the “primer diluvio” (“first flood”) (3). Because, as he notes, this story is
intertwined with a sense of Zapotec agricultural time, the flood could also refer to the first flood of the rainy season- the *guciguie* (*H* 67, 131 and *N* 3). With this point in mind, an allegorical reading of the story as a story about the growth of language and the oral tradition is possible. First, Henestrosa is clear that flowers do not speak with words but with perfume; this metaphor relates words to their aural nature, moving language closer to the realm of song. In the story, bird songs mark the day and interrupt Extagabeñe’s courting. Extagabeñe’s “last word” is his “best word,” as it finally convinces/awakens Mudubina to love, but the reader cannot access what he says. Here, the male flower is the first to be granted the word, but it is Mudubina’s- the silent, coy female’s word that precipitates the flood. Her “yes” is a feature of the narration, and it is a powerful yes capable of propagating itself; as noted above, “propagar” is synonymous with to multiply, extend, and even dilate. Her “yes” is multiplied in that it is graphically represented in the written account, presumably voiced aloud in an oral account, and works as a narrative device to demonstrate the relationship between language and landscape. While one might argue that her “yes” precipitates destruction, what we see in this allegorical reading is the power of language to create (and multiply) new relationships, forms, and stories.

Indeed, the story of Mudubina and Extagabeñe is multiplied in *Neza*. It is featured in Volume II, number 16 (September 1936) and again in Volume II, number 17 (October 1936). In the first instance, former editor Adolfo Gurrión relates the story to a present day custom in the Isthmus. Gurrión begins the article, “Mudubina (MUUDU, botón; BINA, lloró)” by recounting the story of Mudubina and Xtagabéeñe (Gurrión’s orthographic representation of the word). Both stories represent Mudubina as chaste and gendered as female. In contrast to Henestrosa’s account that immediately relates the flower’s closed
petals to virginity and Zapotec understandings of proper femininity, Gurrión codes Mudubina as a priestess of the night whose whiteness resembles the “liturgical moon” (Gurrión 2). After recounting the story, Gurrión explains that Juchitecas wear necklaces made from the mudubina; they wear these necklaces in the evenings on their way to the market as a symbol and offering (much like priestesses) of love.

Nazario Chacón Pineda recounts a much different story in “Xtagabeñe,” featuring a grandson and his grandmother. In the story, a little boy named Too races home to his nana (“grandmother”) to tell her that he has seen the goddess of lakes. That night, his grandmother has difficulty sleeping and watches over her grandson. The next morning Too plays with his friends at the river but falls ill. Once back at home, he asks his grandmother for his mother, wondering when his mother would return. That night, there is a big storm. The vidchaa (“witches”) are the only ones who can speak the language of flowers, and they believe the goddess of the lake (Xtagabeñe) is angry. They chant and ask her to tell them what is wrong. At the lake, the witches see a blue swan dive into the water from a red cloud, and a radiant flower emerges in its place. They hear Xtagabeñe’s voice, and she tells them that she created the storm, not out of anger, but to call them and reveal a secret. The witches return to the village and decorate Too’s house with flowers; they reveal the secret: Too is the son of flowers. Chacón Pineda’s story differs in many ways from the previous two. In the first place, it is not a story to explain a feature of the natural world or a local custom. Secondly, Chacon Pineda’s version relishes its written form. He includes a dedication to his grandmother, Benita Pineda, which mirrors the grandson-grandmother relationship of the story. The story is also written in a way that reflects a story arc: Chacón Pineda sets the scene, establishes relationships, reveals the
problem of the sick, motherless child, and the problem is resolved with the help of the witches and their power to speak the language of flowers. Chacón Pineda features the Zapotec language much more strongly. Rather than breaking down Mudubina into its parts as the other two stories do, he uses Zapotec to name people and places, create dialogue, and to represent the witches chant. Lastly, Chacón Pineda creates his story around Xtagabeñe- not Mudubina. He genders Xtagabeñe as female when the flower had previously been gendered male, and grants her divinity. She is the goddess of lakes, an identity that is revealed through his translation of the witches chant. In all these ways, Chacon Pineda’s account gestures to a written recreation of the “original” story about the water lilies. This transformation (not progression) is built into Neza as the journal first publishes Henestrosa’s account, moves to Gurrión’s, and then to Chacon Pineda’s. Readers get the opportunity to experience the multiplication of the story as it moves from the oral to the written tradition in these three versions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that during a time in which literacy meant spoken and written fluency in Spanish and Indigenous languages were denigrated as dialects, Neza opens up a window into a grassroots effort to promote Zapotec through the study of linguistics, history, and literature. Neza’s aim was to promote the Isthmus culture and land that its contributors loved. In doing so, its contributors took up the task of constructing a Zapotec archive to connect the oral and written traditions. Part of achieving this task was learning how to represent Zapotec in Latin letters. The graphic representation of Zapotec was at the center of Henestrosa’s writing and collection of the
oral tradition as it was at the center for the work of other contributors such as Wilfrido Cruz and Adolfo Gurrión. Their work reveals a concerted effort to listen to the language for its stories, creating a new forum to circulate their tribal-centric work. At the same time, these writers were carving out a space for Zapotec language and literature as a part of Mexican culture.

In several of Henestrosa’s contributions, for example, we see how he draws on language to understand and narrate the Zapotec past and the Zapotec present. His work, along with that of others such as poet Pancho Nacar who only published in Zapotec, contributed to a language revitalization project that helped to set a foundation for its official alphabet in 1956.\textsuperscript{99} The Zapotec journal, \textit{Guchachi'Reza} played a major role in this final move to alphabetize the language, but it is indebted to the work of the previous generation of writers and thinkers who were a part of \textit{Neza}. Today, the official policy in Mexico maintains that it is a plurilingual state. While there is much work to be done to share the responsibility of what this official recognition means in practice, Indigenous writers in Mexico are leading the way in language revitalization efforts.\textsuperscript{100} These efforts, particularly in the Isthmus as \textit{Neza} elucidates, have their histories, too.

\textsuperscript{99} The official alphabet was voted on by La Mesa Redonda sobre el Alfabeto Zapoteco (“The Zapotec Alphabet Round Table”).

\textsuperscript{100} See for example Inés Hernández-Ávila’s essay, “The Power of Native Languages and the Performance of Indigenous Autonomy: The Case of Mexico.”
In chapter three, I argued that the Zapotec writer Andrés Henestrosa’s work reveals a process of survivance through which he and other writers dealt with the assimilationist milieu of post-revolutionary Mexico and a declining literacy in Zapotec by reviving the language and oral tradition in the journal *Neza*. In this chapter, I turn to excavating a North-South circuit characterized by travel and religious syncretism in the early works of Osage writer John Joseph Mathews. These works include his historical novel *Wah’Kon-Tah* (1932), his novel *Sundown* (1934) and an autobiography *Talking to the Moon* (1945). While Henestrosa moved North to continue his Zapotec research from 1936-1938, John Joseph Mathews moved South in 1939 to better understand the spiritual roots of Big Moon Peyotism, a new religion amongst the Osage. Big Moon Peyotism is a sect of Peyotism associated with the teachings of John Wilson (Caddo), which was adopted by the Osage in contrast to Half Moon Peyotism. Mathews observes in his fiction and nonfiction, that Big Moon Peyotism represents a transcultural force shaped by Christianity and the Osage Religion. His modernism then articulates spiritual Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections. The historical context surrounding Peyote confirms that these connections depended upon a material Peyote circuit to bring Indigenous peoples together across space and time.

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101 Throughout this chapter, I will use Big Moon Peyotism, Peyotism, and Peyote Church interchangeably. This variation is a reflection of Mathews’s variable use of terms as well as the historical research undertaken to better understand the historical phenomenon. I capitalize the word Peyote in its noun form because it was and is considered sacred by its practitioners.
Mathews is the most widely read writer in this dissertation to be identified as a modernist. American Studies scholars researching in the field of ethnic modernism turn to his novel, *Sundown*, to interpret the Osage protagonist’s alienation from Euro-American modernity and traditional Osage culture and to trace an affinity between Western and Indigenous forms. Mathews’s fiction and nonfiction has enriched Osage tribal-national literature and American Indian intellectual history, making Mathews a must-read in Native North American Studies. Peyotism in Mathews’s texts is a relatively minor theme but this chapter seeks to give it an Indigenous afterlife by contextualizing, interpreting, and appreciating Mathews’s insight into its transindigenous roots. I argue that by fashioning himself as an Indigenous ethnographer in his texts, Mathews develops his transcultural thesis about Peyote as a form of spiritual syncretism and transculturation. His non-fiction writing captures this intellectual interest whereas his novel captures a social concern: the protagonist’s isolation from the Peyote Church and the community it represents. While Mathews’s transcultural thesis is informed by his formation as a geologist, it is further supported by the Osage cosmological belief of moving forward. When applied to his texts, the notion of moving forward offers tribal insight into the dilemma of what to make of the changes wrought by modernization and colonization. At stake in this argument is excavating an important North-South circuit of sharing religious knowledge and a spiritual dimension to transindigenous modernism.

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102 See Keresztesi, Schedler, and Musiol.
103 See Hunter, Warrior, and Kalter.
Indigenous Ethnography

Ethnography, an emerging field of study in the early twentieth century, depended on travel for its material and intellectual labor of cultural critique.\textsuperscript{104} Travel brought subject and object of study in contact. Through observation, interaction, and interpretation, the modern ethnographer created meaning, elucidating the primitive/indigenous/tribal Other for the West. Early twentieth-century ethnographic practice played a fundamental role in constructing the Indian through personal detachment and scientific methods in the name of objectivity.\textsuperscript{105} Unlike the mediators we see in Downing and Henestrosa, Mathews fashions a literary persona akin to the ethnographer even though he is himself Osage.\textsuperscript{106} I begin here because although Mathews did not receive formal training as an ethnographer, his texts are unified by a sense of detachment in content and style similar to the modern ethnographer described by James Clifford. I draw attention to Mathews as an ethnographer to stress the layers of historical, stylistic, and geographic distance between the writer and the “object” of study, and how the Peyote “part” of his work contributes to his interpretation of the whole.

\textsuperscript{104} See Clifford’s \textit{Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography and Art}. He begins with a reading of William Carlos Williams’s poem “To Elsie” that foregrounds the poets’ ethnographic distance in writing about the break down of local culture and lost authenticity.

\textsuperscript{105} My use of the term scientific refers to ethnography’s position within the social sciences and the assumption that Science is created through a formal series of steps within a community of fellow scientists. See Kuhn \textit{The Structure of Scientific Methods}. My generalization is meant to be suggestive.

\textsuperscript{106} Audra Simpson (Mohawk) describes her ethnographic practice within the Mohawk nation as “ethnography in the familiar” (75). Her concept of ethnographic refusal, of staking out limits to research, would have been incompatible with Mathews’s thinking who felt the old ways were dying and needed to be recorded.
Mathews’s biography provides support for why he would fashion an ethnographic persona in literature. In the first instance, there is a distance of time and space between the historical events that Mathews narrates. Susan Kalter notes in the introduction to his autobiography that Mathews “was a magnificent witness to a remarkable historical period” (xxix). Mathews, who was born in 1894 on the Osage Reservation in Indian Country would live through a particularly tumultuous time in modern Osage history. He was a child when communal Osage lands were allotted, that is divided to enrolled tribal members, and when the Osage Reservation became a county in the state of Oklahoma. As an adult, he served on the Osage Tribal Council and helped to found the Osage Tribal Museum in 1938. In between, Mathews left the reservation in 1914 to study at the University of Oklahoma, interrupting his studies to enlist in the U.S. Cavalry and later becoming a pilot in the US Signal Corps during World War I (Warrior 18). Mathews resumed his studies at the University Of Oklahoma and graduated with a degree in geology in 1920. He graduated B.A. Oxon from Merton College with a degree in natural sciences in 1923. He also attended the School for International Affairs in Geneva and worked as a League of Nations correspondent for the Philadelphia Ledger. When Mathews returned to the reservation in 1929, he was confronted with the deep changes from the period he calls “The Great Frenzy” during the Great Depression. “The Great Frenzy,” roughly between 1916 and 1929 is a period associated with extreme oil wealth amongst the Osage and corresponding white criminality. Robert Warrior (Osage) writes that, “These events took place by and large while Mathews was abroad and only upon his return did he understand the great changes brought about by more than two decades of spectacular wealth” (18). What becomes apparent is that the well-educated, cosmopolitan
Mathews was either not born yet or was abroad for many of the historical changes his work discusses. In pointing out this biographical information, I do not seek to discredit his perspective but to point out the historical and geographical distance the real Mathews worked through to create a sense of ethnographic presence in his first two texts.

Secondly, Mathews was neither a practitioner of Peyotism nor was Mathews a member of the Native American Church, a religious institution that continues to this day initially founded in 1918 to protect Peyote-use as an aspect of American Indian religious freedom. In biographies of the author, there is little evidence to suggest that Mathews followed any particular religion in his adult life but he was raised with contact to Protestant, Catholic, and traditional Osage peoples. Warrior describes how Mathews’s “existence as a youngster did not fit into any of the typical patterns of reservation life at the time” (15). Within a patrilineal culture, Mathews’s Osage lineage was traced to his great-grandmother A-Ci’n-Ge. Mathews was neither quite the “mixed-blood” given his English Protestant background rather than a French Catholic one. During Mathews’s lifetime, Peyotism was prevalent amongst “full-blood” Osages, a biological and political category describing the most traditional faction, defined in contrast to the “mixed-blood” and white settlers. That Mathews was not a direct participant in the Peyote Church points to his research-driven interests in documenting its impact on the Osage.

In 1939, Mathews was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to study in Mexico. An excerpt from the 1939-1940 Founders Report describes that Mathews was “appointed for the preparation of a book based on the conflicting expression of two races, the American
Indian and the invading European, in religion, philosophy, and the creative arts." What is striking about this brief research statement is its inclusion of the study of religion.

Kalter’s archival work to publish Mathew’s diaries in his posthumously published *Twenty Thousand Mornings* uncovered an important document highlighting Mathew’s interest in Peyote. She writes, “In September 1940, he wrote from the Blackjacks to the secretary at the Guggenheim Foundation that he had returned from Mexico early after contracting jungle fever and that he was laying the manuscript for his fellowship aside because two old men upon whom he depended for information on Peyote Church ritual had been ill recently” (xxxix). Kalter speculates that Mathews’s fieldwork in Mexico as a Guggenheim scholar may have been “folded into *Talking to the Moon...*” or in his *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters* (1961) because of the prevalence of Peyote in both (qtd. in *TTM* xl). In applying and presumably carrying out a research project in Mexico, we see a biographic example of Mathews’s self-fashioning as an ethnographer. The letter documents an Indigenous- to- Indigenous connection in which Mathews sought to better understand the religious knowledge underpinning Peyote ritual. Given his use of the term “Peyote church” we can infer that he was either referring to the adoption of Peyotism by Plains Indians who were the first to form the Native American Church or as shorthand for Peyote ritual generally. The letter does not indicate where Mathews was located in Mexico, which could offer a better indication of his research intentions. We can assume that the two old men who served as Mathews’s informants were Indigenous,

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107 This description of his research statement is available on the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation website.
108 The Blackjacks is a name for the sandstone house Mathews built on his allotted land. The name comes from the type of oak tree native to the region.
but they could also be mestizo *peyoteros* (Peyote harvesters) with insight into Peyote rituals. The letter thus documents how Mathews, himself an Indigenous scholar who was interested in how Peyote had changed the Osage Tribal Religion, traveled to Mexico to learn more about Peyote use, an Indigenous religious practice.

In this way, Mathews was not unlike other American Indian writers of his time who depended on a North-South circuit to theorize and narrate their realities. In his book, James H. Cox examines American Indian literature produced between 1920 and 1960 and argues that writers such as Darcy McNickle, Lynn Riggs, Will Rogers, John Milton Oskison, and Todd Downing shared a “political affinity for and historical interest in indigenous Mexico” (2). For these writers, Indigenous Mexico represented a wellspring of revolutionary potential to help imagine their own tribal, and indeed a larger, Indigenous future. In contrast to Downing and the other American Indian writers in his study, Cox maintains that, “Mexico is a hidden part of Mathews’s political and intellectual enterprise” (134). Although Mexico may be a hidden dimension in Mathews’s work, it is noteworthy that Mathews sought to travel to Mexico to better understand the “conflicting expression” of Anglo-European and Indigenous traditions. His interest in studying conflicting religious expression speaks to an understanding of spiritual origins and hemispheric connections.

Peyotism and Big Moon Peyotism specifically are research topics that deserve their own attention. In this chapter, I am interested in how Mathews observes and narrates its place in a culture undergoing much change, articulating a modernism with spiritual and material dimensions and connections across the geographic U.S. and Mexico. To trace these material and spiritual transformations, I draw from Clifford’s notion of travel
(and dwelling) as vectors for writing culture. Clifford’s paper “Traveling Cultures” given at a Cultural Studies Conference in 1990 sets out a key theoretical insight for understanding the connections between travel, routes, and roots I see in Mathews’s texts. I draw from Clifford’s concept of “travel” because the movement of people and material goods inform how and why they are taken up in writing. In his essay, Clifford reflects on the term “travel” as a translation term to think about the ways that cultures are sites of travel and dwelling. For much of the essay, Clifford pushes the term to its limits, noting how “travel” has been enmeshed in hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality, identity categories that also have their own histories and entanglements. For example, nineteenth- and early twentieth- century travel literature generally featured the heroic, white male researcher or explorer, ignoring the women and peoples of color who supported their expeditions. Yet, Clifford finds the term useful despite and because of these historical layers because “travel” speaks to the “material [and] spatial practices that produce knowledges, stories, traditions, comportments, musics, books, diaries, and other cultural expressions” (35). For Clifford, travel and dwelling are not oppositional practices although, as Stuart Hall points out in the question and answer, Clifford did not adequately conceptualize dwelling (44). Hall asks, “what stays the same even when you travel?” (44). Additionally, Homi Bhabha asks about the “people caught in that margin of nonmovement within an economy of movement” (43). The dialogue surrounding travel and dwelling goes a long way in conceptualizing how Mathews’s historical context and social position inform his writing. We might ask: who or what is traveling? Who is

109 Scholars also note a similar thread in Mathews’s writing about women. See Kalter and Snyder. Not enough attention has been given to his representations of African Americans working in the Osage Nation.
caught in the margin of nonmovement and why? What are the politics and practices of dwelling on the reservation?

When applied to the field of literature, Clifford’s insights are not unlike Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of the autoethnographic text. Pratt defines the autoethnographic text as “a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” (35). These texts are “phenomenon of the contact zones” the “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (Pratt 34, 36). Taken together, Clifford’s and Pratt’s theoretical insights help to elucidate the importance of genre in Mathews’ literary production as well as the historical contexts informing them. For example, *Talking to the Moon* is an autobiographical text throughout which Mathews documents a period of ten years living alone in a sandstone house amongst the blackjacks. Kalter categorizes *Wah’Kon-Tah* as a historical novel, identifying it as a “reverse ethnography” because of the way Mathews fictionalizes Major Laban J. Miles’s diaries; Miles was a long-time Indian agent during the reservation period. These genres overlap in *Sundown*; while it may be mistaken as autobiographical given similarities between Mathews and the protagonist, it is best understood as a novel. As we will see in the synopses below, two of the key historical contexts informing Mathews’s work are that of the reservation period (*Wah’Kon Tah*) and the allotment period (*Sundown*) which can be read as different moments of contact, each reconstituting the binds between notions of

110 In categorizing *Wah’Kon-Tah* as a historical novel, Kalter asks readers to “acknowledge the faithfulness of *Wah’Kon-Tah* as history while also recognizing its compositional formation as a novel” (44).
travel and home. Despite and perhaps because of the layers of distance in the texts, Mathews’s ethnographic persona enables him to describe and engage hegemonic representations of Indians (simulations that feed into domination) while writing survivance and contributing to American Indian intellectual sovereignty.

Wah’Kon-Tah: The Osage and the White Man’s Road (1932) is Mathews’ historical novel of the Osage reservation period from 1878-1932. Although the last reservation period begins in 1865 with the Sept. 29 treaty at Vaneville trading post, Wah’Kon-Tah begins with Major Laban J. Miles’s arrival as Indian agent on the Osage Reservation in 1878. His arrival was just six years after the tribe relocated after a “mislocation” to the reservation they bought from the Cherokees (Mathews W 333-336). Throughout the text, readers learn about Miles’s experiences travelling with cash to make annuity payments while fearing white bandits, his musings over settler migration and representations of the Osage, and readers learn about the tribe through his conversations with tribal elders and friends over matters such as food rations, horse stealing, misleading settler claims for cattle, boarding school, mourning dances, and burials. The novel ends with Miles’s death and a brief look at the character Eagle That Dreams, demonstrating the split between his traditional (and Peyote) practices and his modern, whiskey drinking, English-speaking son. Wah’Kon-Tah includes accompanying illustrations in the form of sketches and maps and was a publishing success for its portrayal of Osage life on the reservation. Selected as a Book-of-the Month Club read, the text was largely accessible to

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111 I discuss Vizenor’s concept of “Survivance” in chapter three. See the conclusion for a closer look at Warrior’s concept of “Intellectual Sovereignty.”
112 Book-of-the-Month Club displays, as Kalter explains, “featured Kachina dolls, Southwestern pottery, and blankets that appear to be Navajo” (qtd. in *TTM* xxxvii). While Mathews worked diligently to educate his audiences about Osage perspectives, the same audiences could simultaneously overlook and erase the tribal-specificity he sought in his intellectual work; this heterogeneity of reception and interpretation is a feature of the autoethnographic text as oppositional and dominant assumptions about culture come into contact (Pratt 37). One could infer the text lived up to, in as much as it challenged, the idea of the noble Indians’ assimilation into white culture.113 With the passing of venerable personalities like Big Chief and Governor Jo alongside the introduction of the “modern” Osage youth, wrecking Cadillacs and drinking whiskey, Mathews’ represents a turbulent time that the Agent saw as a period of transition and adjustment to the shock of modernization.

With Miles as Mathews’s informant, it is no wonder that the historical novel strikes a nostalgic tone about the vanishing old ways. Because the historical novel takes as its historical reference Miles’s notebooks, Kalter observes that scholars have dismissed the text for its “dependence upon a non-native writer” (26). Mathews inherited Miles’s notebooks when he returned to the Osage Nation in 1929 (Warrior 22). Even though much of Mathews’s papers are archived in the University of Oklahoma, the notebooks are

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112 Kalter claims that Mathews “wrote primarily for national (US) and international audiences, even while focusing on the local and regional, educating those audiences about Osage perspectives arising from Osage intellectual, social, and tribal history” (qtd. in *TTM* xxi).

113 Henestrosa’s *Hombres* undergoes a similar process; this could be described as a feature of the indigenous authored text during indigenismo (its historical life—not its afterlife).
still in “private hands” and unavailable to the public (Kalter 45). Why Mathews inherited these diaries is unclear, but their travel between hands highlights an instance of the knowledge and aesthetic production that comes from movement and translation; Mathews gives Miles’s diaries an Indigenous afterlife through (re)writing. Moreover, Kalter generates an Indigenous afterlife for *Wah’Kon-Tah*, arguing that Mathews creates multiple levels of consciousness that refuse to give Major Miles the last word on the Osage’s transition to reservation life. Her careful study to reinterpret and to recover the text reveals the tensions between Miles’s voice as presumed protagonist, Mathews’s voice as author, and the voices of tribal collective memory. By structuring the text with competing voices, Mathews foregrounds his ethical and intellectual concerns and awareness for representing those who could and at the same time could not represent themselves. Miles’s diaries provide an ethnographic presence, a sense of immediacy, between himself and his “object” of study that Mathews inherits. Mathews’s re-writing (and translation) of the text recasts the heroic white-male gaze from the position of the observed, producing new knowledge- in short, a new book from the perspective of the Indigenous ethnographer.

In many ways, *Sundown* takes up where *Wah’Kon-Tah* left off. Chronicling the debates leading up to the period of allotment through the Great Depression, the novel brings into focus *Wah’Kon-Tah*’s chapters “Civilization Arrives” and “The Great Frenzy” through the character of Challenge “Chal” Windzer. Chal is the son of an Osage “full-blood” mother and a “mixed-blood” father. He is named Challenge because, as his father prophesies, “He shall be a challenge to the disinheritors of his people” (Mathews 4). The novel follows Chal from birth, through his primary education in both government and
private schools, a time at the University, as a pilot during World War I, and his return to Kihekah (a fictionalized Pawhuska) where he turns to alcoholism and partying. After a brief stint in a sweat lodge with his childhood friend and Peyotist Sun-on-his-wings, the novel ends with Chal telling his mother that he has decided to go to law school to become a great orator. There is little indication of what his future holds. Particularly in light of the multiple references to Chal’s inability to express his thoughts and feelings into language, his desire to become a great orator appears doubtful. Chal’s outsider status resonates with a sense of detachment, a theme I develop in my reading of the novel in the final section of this chapter.

In 1934, Mathews moved to his allotted land and his home, which he called “The Blackjacks.” He lived alone in the house for a period of ten years. *Talking to the Moon* reflects this ten-year period in Mathews’s life, providing anecdotes and philosophical reflections. Anecdotes include the construction of his sandstone house, hunting trips, gardening, keeping chickens safe from coyotes, visits with friends, watching the social dances, and following a portrait artist hired to paint portraits of Osage elders. Mathews observes changes in the land including soil erosion and decreasing animal populations. Like *Wah ’Kon-Tah*, the book includes illustrations above chapter titles as well as within the text. In this book, he elaborates biological laws informed by his observation about environmental and social change and progression. These laws include the primal laws of reproduction and survival and the urge to ornamentation (expression). Mathews includes thoughts about the Peyote Church, as we will see below, and a critique of Amer-European culture in its historical present, World War II.

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114 See Warrior for a thorough treatment of Mathews’s biological laws.
Talking to the Moon is Mathews inward look into what stays the same in the face of ganitha- social chaos, but also in the face of transindigenous change such as within the movement and change spearheaded by Peyote. The title offers support for this double movement. First, twelve of the fourteen chapters are named after the traditional Osage calendar. In “talking” to the “moon,” Mathews records his thoughts onto this traditional, natural cycle: Just-Doing-That Moon (roughly March) becomes “Planting Moon” and so forth. Second, “Moon” in the title references Moonhead, Big Moon Peyotism, and the East and West Moon altars. In The Osages, Mathews writes that the Osage gave John Wilson the nickname Moonhead “because of his obsession with the moon” (745). Wilson called his Peyote-induced trances, journeys to the moon (Mathews 743). We can read the text as a form of ethnographic writing in which Mathews assumes the literary and anthropological gaze, foregrounding travel and dwelling at multiple scales: dwelling and travel through philosophical reflection, a solitary life at the Blackjacks while recorder/archivist of changing (traveling) Osage traditions. He writes: “During this time I am always aware of the god that came out these ridges as the concept of man, and I like to visit with the people who conceived him and watch the changes under the flow of time, just as I watch the changes in life about me and the changes within myself” (emphasis mine 78). In this passage, Mathews cements his position as a detached observer looking in on Osage religious practices, but he also puts himself under this gaze. Understanding the text as an ethnography further highlights the reservation/Osage County as a contact zone; the text, vis-à-vis Pratt’s insight into autoethnographical texts,115 foregrounds transculturation and resistance and is part of a literary/anthropological corpus ranging

115 See Pratt 35-37.
from studies by Francis LaFlesche (Omaha), Frank G. Speck,\textsuperscript{116} and Weston La Barre\textsuperscript{117} to the French Surrealist Antonin Artaud.\textsuperscript{118} Mathews’s salvage approach to documenting what he sees as the vanishing of the old ways nonetheless resonates with Osage cosmology: Mathews does not devalue or fear change but recognizes its natural and inevitable flow: it is always moving forward, never backward.

\textit{Ganitha: The Origins and Spread of Peyote in the US}

Mathews’s texts register loss and uncertainty but they also register his recognition that time keeps moving forward despite these changes. A geologist by training and an archivist of traditional Osage practices, Mathews would certainly know that Peyote was not “natural” to the Plains. Peyote was not a native plant in Mathew’s blackjacks. Peyote was brought into Oklahoma, activating new routes (and roots) of spirituality for Indigenous peoples in the North. In this way, Peyotism offers an extraordinary history to understand the material and spiritual dimensions of transindigenous modernism. First, its adoption by Native American communities speaks to the impact that modernity/coloniality had on disrupting traditional religious practices. Second, it connects North and South through (1) the physical movement of Peyote and peoples and (2) through spiritual teachings and ritual. This material and spiritual circuit surpasses Clifford’s traveling/dwelling matrix through its emphasis on religious transcendence and

\textsuperscript{116} Speck is the author of “Note on the Ethnology of the Osage Indians” (1907) and “Notes on the Life of John Wilson, the Revealor of the Peyote, as recalled by his nephew George Anderson” (1933). See Stewart and Swan.

\textsuperscript{117} La Barre’s Ph.D. dissertation, “The Peyote Cult” was completed in 1938. See Stewart and Swan.

\textsuperscript{118} See Artaud \textit{A Voyage to the Land of The Tarahumaras} (1936).
hemispheric Indigenous connections across time and space. In this section, I trace
Peyote’s material and spiritual travel into the U.S. and the diverse responses it generated
from within the American Indian community. I begin with this brief overview of Peyote
to highlight a key premise underlying my argument: historically, Peyote spread
throughout tribal nations in the U.S. in large part because of its power to heal
communities affected by removal, and the reservation and allotment-eras. I place
Mathews’s texts in conversation with this historical context to underscore how the
adoption and transformation of Peyote amongst the Osage were responses to *ganitha*
(“social chaos”).

Peyote (*Lophophora williamsi*) is a hallucinogenic cactus native to a geographic
area that extends from what is now South Texas in the U.S. and throughout the northern
Mexican states of Chihuahua and Coahuila, moving southward through parts of Durango,
Zacatecas, and San Luis Potosí. Peyote, as a sacred plant, has its roots prior to the nation-
state and colonization. Its use by Indigenous Mexicans dates to pre-Columbian times as
part of religious and healing practices. In the U.S., it is a sacrament in the Native
American Church, ritually eaten in the form of dried Peyote buttons or drunk as tea by
peyotists in more than fifty tribes (Morgan and Stewart 270). Coras, Tarahumaras, and
Huicholes continue to maintain traditional uses of Peyote (Maroukis 17). For example,
Huicholes practice their annual “Peyote hunt” which begins with a Peyote ceremony and
consists of a pilgrimage to the first Peyote, a journey of approximately 300 miles to the
Peyote fields (Maroukis 18). The Karankawa, a coastal tribe from present-day Texas, also
performed pilgrimage to the “Peyote gardens” in South Texas; written records support
one such pilgrimage in 1816 (Morgan and Stewart 284). Its use on both sides of the
border attests to an important transindigenous circuit of spiritual routes and roots that coincides with its formation as an object of study by early ethnographers and botanists. U.S. nation-state formation was a major factor in Peyote’s movement North. While there is robust research regarding Huichol uses of Peyote and similarities between Huichol practices and beliefs with American Indian uses of Peyote, Thomas Constantine Maroukis suggests that contact between Huicholes and Native tribes north of the border is improbable (21). Rather, tribal nations that lived in the borderlands (the margins) of contemporary U.S. and Mexico maintained this North-South connection and alternative Indigenous contact. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, six tribal nations were developing a “spiritual and ceremonial usage that became the basis for later Peyotism;” along the Rio Grande were the Mescalero Apaches, the Lipan Apaches, and the Carrizos and the Tankawas, Karankawas and Caddos were northeast of Peyote’s native habitat (Maroukis 22). The 1816 Karankawa pilgrimage offers an example since the Karankawa would have been traveling throughout Indigenous/Mexican land before the U.S. and Mexican borders were redrawn in 1848. Indian removal in Texas, now part of the U.S. nation-state, played two roles in the spread of Peyote-use north of the US. border: creating an alternative, spiritual contact and a material market to meet demand. Tribal nations native to Texas were removed to Oklahoma in 1857. Firsthand interviews confirm that Peyote leaders among the Carrizos were responsible for teaching Peyote spirituality and practices (Maroukis 23). From here, Peyotism moved to the Lipan

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119 See Bruhn and Holmstedt. Peyote became an object of study by U.S. ethnographers beginning in 1887 with Briggs, but its use was noted by Spanish colonizers and identified in Mexican pharmacopeia in 1846 (Bruhn and Holmstedt 353-354).
120 Present-day Texas is a thrice colonized land by Spain, Mexico, and the United States.
Apaches to the Kiowas, Kiowa-Apaches, and Comanches. The latter were responsible for developing the Comanche Way/ Half Moon Way (Maroukis 25). Peyote spirituality, although dating to pre-Columbian times, thus travels within a context of nation-state consolidation as seen in its widespread use during the reservation period, acquiring both tribal and inter-tribal resonances. Within the contact zone of the reservation-era, many Native peoples turn to Peyotism as a way to become agents of their own spiritual beliefs and practices, and communal well-being.

With Native groups removed from the traditional Peyote habitat or pilgrimage circuits, the Peyote trade emerges to meet Native needs. George R. Morgan and Omer C. Stewart outline the commercial development of the Peyote trade from its recorded origins in the 1880s and consider the problems facing the trade from its inception. From oil fields, brush clearing, improper harvesting, and a growing demand, there has been significant reduction of the plant’s native habitat north of the border. Although most of Peyote’s native habitat is in Mexico, “the South Texas brush country is the only region in the United States where the little psychotropic cactus grows in sufficient abundance to supply the peyote religion” in the U.S. (Morgan and Stewart 269). Much of their argument is in defense of the peyotero, a person who traditionally harvests and dries Peyote, worked with peyotists and helped to conserve the plant with their harvesting techniques. Peyoteros, particularly in the northern counties of South Texas dried Peyote, selling it as the Peyote buttons used in sacrament. Morgan and Stewart write that the dry cactus was an “ideal item for trade” because it was lightweight, durable and easily compressed (271). Moreover, it can be stored for an indefinite amount of time without losing any of the hallucinogenic alkaloids (Morgan and Stewart 271). With the rise of the
railroad network, Peyote was easily shipped throughout the North. Morgan and Stewarts’s research nonetheless points to the formation of an alternative Peyote economy for Indigenous peoples stuck within the margin of nonmovement.

With its easy movement and adoption by Native groups, Peyote also incurred opposition from prohibitionists, assimilationists, and Christian groups. The Progressive-era (1890-1920) marks a particularly tumultuous time as the Office of Indian Affairs turned to Congress’s legislative powers to try and suppress the “peyote religion” (Hoxie 80). The U.S. Congress Act of 1897 made it illegal to sell alcohol to Indians, and Indian agents linked Peyote to alcohol in order to enforce its prohibition under this Act; however, a ruling in 1916 ruled that Peyote could not be linked to alcohol (Morgan and Stewart 288, 290).\footnote{Between 1916 and 1963, 12 federal antipeyote bills were introduced and failed in Congress (2 Morgan and Stewart 90).} The political and social backlash against Peyotism is part of a long history of Native American religious oppression. In the U.S., the Indian Religious Crimes Code of 1883 and “The Rules for Indian Courts” of 1892 banned religious ceremonies, dances, and specifically targeted medicine men (Irwin 35-36). Missionaries also received federal support to Christianize Indigenous people through boarding schools, bans on religious practices, languages and the destruction of sacred objects (Irwin 40-41). At the hemispheric level, oppression of Indigenous religions can be dated back to 1493 with the Inter Caetera bull issued by Pope Alexander VI that specifically linked Christianization to colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands (Deloria 274). Peyote thus spread as a form of resistance to religious oppression, displacement and exploitation during the reservation-era. It is a North-South circuit of Indigenous spiritual survival and resistance.
that geographically intersected with the East-West Ghost Dance movement associated with Wovoca (Paiute) and through the person of John Wilson who, for a time, followed Wovoca. Wovoca instructed his followers that practicing the dance would lead to the removal of Anglo-Americans and a return to traditional ways of life and the buffalo (Irwin 40). Given the long history of Native American religious oppression, it is no wonder that a movement that would challenge Native American Christians and traditionalists such as the Peyote Church would generate dissent from within the American Indian community.

One such anti-Peyote advocate was the activist and writer, Zitkala-Sa (Sioux), well-known for her essay, “Why I am a Pagan.” In “The Menace of Peyote” (ca. 1916), Zitkala-Sa argues that the U.S. Congress ought to restrict the traffic of Peyote because of its negative social, moral, and health effects. Zitkala-Sa argues that Peyote is “dangerous and habit-forming” like alcohol and drugs (239). She represents Peyote users as “victims,” particularly the children who are “sometimes forced to eat it” (240). To make her argument, she appeals to Christian and Indian spiritual and moral authorities. At the theological level, she denies the possibility of religious syncretism; Peyote rituals are neither Christian nor Indian. What appear to be Christian rituals are merely rituals, which, “have been borrowed as a cloak to hide under, and to evade the law of morals and decency” (240). To support her case for legal action, she appeals to a 1760 Christian church ban on Peyote eating, and the “days of the Montezumas” when Peyote was forbidden by law because of its intoxicating effects (239). Like the Christian church, she

122 See also Charles Eastman’s “Ghost Dance War,” which accounts for the aftermath of Wounded Knee, the murder in December 1890 of Lakota men, women, and children who participated in the Ghost Dance.
depicts the Aztecs as a source of moral authority and legal precedence, further
criminalizing Peyote use. This move to an Aztec past works in sharp contrast to the
bloodthirsty, warrior-like representations we see in Orozco’s mural. By claiming that
even the Aztecs understood Peyote as a menace, she seeks to support her claim that
Peyote rituals are not Indian.

However, Zitkala-Sa was mistaken in her move to the Aztec past. Aztecs used
“morning glories, a variety of mushrooms, jimsonweed, and several types of cacti,
including Peyote, which was also in widespread use in northern Mexico” (emphasis mine, Maroukis 16). It was the Spanish colonial government, under the beckoning of the Catholic Church that outlawed Peyote use in 1620 (Maroukis 16, Morgan and Stewart 287). This error highlights what can be interpreted as a North-South moral map on which Zitkla-Sa bases her argument. The Christian North and Aztec South stand as moral centers in her rhetoric. In contrast, the border region is one of transgression. Not only is this the region where Peyote naturally grows, it has a long history of Peyote use. She admits that, “only the Indians of northern Mexico used peyote in an annual dance” (239). In this instance, Zitkala-Sa relegates Huicholes to the past, and this rhetorical move denies the Indigenous-to Indigenous circuit of sharing that peyotists created. Moreover, she claims that “unscrupulous men” working in this border region are busy trafficking Peyote into the U.S. where its use has spread “between the Rio Grande and the Pacific, up to the Dakotas and even to Wisconsin and Utah” (239). In this case, Zitkala-Sa criminalizes peyotists. To dispel this criminality, we need only look to Frank Cortinas who was a venerated peyotero known to give green Peyote, participate in ceremonies, and allow Indians to camp on his land, thus facilitating pilgrimages to the sacred “Peyote
gardens” in South Texas (Morgan and Stewart 282, 283, 284). For Zitkala-Sa, the Peyote trade is part of an illicit and immoral economy of movement that threatens Indigenous peoples north of the border.

D’Arcy McNickle’s 1943 article “Peyote and the Indian” (Salish Kootenai) contests the anti-Peyotist position that Peyote-use is neither Indian nor moral. Writing in defense of the “peyote cult,” he charts the origin and development of Peyote use in the U.S., highlighting its social and religious significance. In doing so, he demystifies its connection to mescal beans and marijuana while affirming the connection between the plant’s psychotrophic effects and individual and community healing. The article provides a useful counterpoint to Zitkala Sa’s progressive-era argument in large part because McNickle reverses the trope of illicit movement. Staking out an anti-peyotist position early in the article, he writes, “…even fair-minded people who, if put to it, will concede that Indians, like all minority groups under our Constitution, are entitled to worship in their accustomed ways, draw the line at peyote worship, because – and this is odd- peyote is not native in the area north of Mexico. It is an imported religion!” (220). McNickle draws attention to a particular impasse: freedom of religion meets its limits at the border, with a so-called “imported” religion from the south. McNickle’s astute observation makes clear that the nativist position is similarly yoked to a static understanding of indigeneity, namely that native practices ought not change unless they do so in a sanctioned way. In this way, McNickle’s argument maintains that the appeal of the Peyote cult is its search for spiritual power in the face of the destruction of traditional ways of life. Peyotism is a response to colonization that places the responsibility for
worship and healing back into the hands of the community. But, as we have seen, Peyote is always on the move. The spread of Peyote across communities meant that the reconstituted religious and social relations had the power to strengthen bonds between tribal members and across tribes: “Where formerly intertribal rivalry and even war prevailed, the Ghost Dance and now the peyote cult have brought about intertribal relations instead” (McNickle 229). McNickle’s argument thus illustrates how the movement of Peyote and Peyotism - its travel across the border and throughout Native communities - helped to create social spaces for dwelling predicated upon individual and communal healing.

Mathews’s ethnographic look at Peyotism coincides thematically with the historical evidence supporting the origins and spread of Peyote into the North. Violent transformations of Osage social structures, *ganitha*, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because of displacement and allotment would set the conditions for Peyote’s adoption by Osage “full-bloods.” First, Mathews accounts for displacement in the reservation period. Through Major Laban J. Miles’s diaries, Mathews explores *ganitha* across a relatively broad historical period between 1878 and 1931 through which we see how notions of travel and home change in response to differing contact zones. The predominant historical focus is on the reservation period, before allotment. Historically, the Osage were located throughout parts of present day Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Through treaties with the United States beginning in 1808, the Osage were continually

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123 In his look at the split within the Society of American Indians over Peyote, Warrior notes, “…the groups that would later become the Native American Church managed to accomplish what the U.S. government was unwilling to allow politically and culturally: internal, self-determined adaptation to a new situation” (12).
forced onto smaller tracts of land, and by 1870, were soon concentrated in Oklahoma, on land they bought from the Cherokee Nation (Hunter HC 61). Through three different treaties in 1808, 1818, and 1825, Osages lost 100,000,000 acres of land (Wilson 8). The Osage had managed to bypass the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 because they had achieved “economic independence,” in the form of quarterly, annuity payments from selling their land in Kansas, leasing land for farming and grazing (Wilson, Hunter HC 62). When Major Miles enters the reservation it is a closed one. As a closed reservation, travel in and out of the space was restricted. Osages who sought to travel out of the reservation required permission from the Indian agent to enter into the United States. Likewise, white settlers seeking employment on the reservation required permission to enter. This system was an attempt by the U.S. government to maintain limits on contact. Despite the restrictions on travel to create a fixed and imposed sense of dwelling, the closed reservation worked as a contact zone ever marked by racialized and gendered categories. One conflict that exemplifies the workings of the contact zone can be read in the aftermath of the debate about beef rations. When the Osage manage to stop their beef rations to rely more on traditional food sources, Mathews writes, “white men sneaked over the boundaries and slaughtered deer and turkey by the thousands… thousands of prairie chickens and quail were killed and shipped out to market” (39-40). The white men who sneak across the border to hunt further destroy traditional hunting grounds, reducing the number of game and thereby undermining Osage food sovereignty.

Second, the historical context of Sundown, namely allotment, highlights a historical transformation in travel and dwelling with the intensification of asymmetrical power relations under big oil. The allotment of Osage land refers to the division of
communally-held land into private property divided according to heads of households as mandated by the Osage Allotment Act of 1906. By the time Osages agreed to allotment there was knowledge about the potential of profits from oil and natural gas. As early as 1896, Henry Foster was granted “exclusive rights to exploration, drilling, and production on the whole reservation,” in what is called the “the blanket lease” (Wilson 101). After years of resistance, traditional “full-bloods” agreed to the allotment of land because of a provision safeguarding communal ownership of mineral resources. This provision made it so that the surface of the land would be divided individually but what was below the surface was to be “held as community property” (Hunter HC 50). Carol Hunter writes that by February 1909, “one and one half million acres were divided equally among 2,229 Osages with each member receiving 657.41 acres” (67). With royalties from oil production, interest payments from the sale of land in Kansas, income from leasing for grazing and farming, an average Osage family generated $5,000-$10,000 a year in annuity payments (Wilson 100).

Although the reservation is no longer a closed one, allotment further construes it as a place of stasis for Indigenous peoples even as white settlers are free to move. The initial wave of migrants after allotment are, “mostly people without means; people who were looking for a chance and filled with the dreams which always influenced the Amer-European on his conquest of the American continent” (50). In Wah’Kon-Tah, one of Major Miles’s primary obligations was policing the borders; with the help of the Indian police, settlers (then traveling in covered wagons) were escorted off the reservation. After allotment, however, white settlers can remain in Kihekah. “The Great Frenzy,” about twelve years after allotment, is characterized by a burgeoning economy of oil. Mathews
writes, “The payments in royalties to the members of the tribe on the roll became larger and larger as the oil production increased. As the production increased, the population increased” (62). The population increase, once again, is in the white settler community. However, the new wave of migrants are part of a professional class to prop up the industry: businessmen, doctors, and geologists. The narrator in Sundown observes that, “almost everyone was a business person, whether they bought things for eight cents and sold them for fifteen cents or three dollars, or rendered professional services. The habit of selling merchandise at a tremendous profit had become a tradition” (243). Vis-à-vis Bhabha’s question to Clifford, we can read how the reservation is a place of nonmovement in which Osages become caught in the margins of an economy of movement. With more and more people seeking to profit from Osage wealth, Mathews observes that many Osages become caught in a cycle of wasteful spending. What he describes as an “Olympian indifference to money,” can be read as the simultaneous absorption and exclusion of Osages into the economy of movement (243). “The Great Frenzy,” also called the “Osage Reign of Terror” is also characterized by increased white criminality because of government approval to grant trusteeship to non-native “guardians” (Warrior 18).

It is as a response to ganitha, the social chaos that ensues with removal and exploitation of Osage lands and the corresponding breakdown of traditional structures and values, that Peyote arrives to promote communal healing and well-being. As early as 1918, Native groups banded together to form the Native American Church to defend their religious worship by seeking First Amendment protection. In response to the Indian Office’s attempt to get Congress to outlaw the use and distribution of Peyote,
practitioners spoke out in favor of Peyote use as a central practice of their religious faith. In 1918, Osage leader Fred Lookout spoke at the congressional hearings held to consider outlawing the use of Peyote in religious rituals. Lookout was part of the Osage Tribal Council and was elected principal chief for twenty-six years (Hoxie 82). In his statement, Lookout claimed that the Osage use Peyote in “the right way” to worship and pray to God (Hoxie 84-85). He claimed to live “in a better way” because of Peyote, which he defined as a life busy farming, raising stock, and making money (Hoxie 85). Like him, other practitioners who were mostly “full-bloods,” were also prosperous, law abiding, and settling-down as homesteaders (Hoxie 85). In response to a question about what would happen if Peyote were to be taken away, Lookout expresses fears that the practitioners would return to the “back-life”- drinking whiskey and being unproductive. Unlike Zitkala-Sa who understood Peyote use as a dangerous addiction, Lookout argues that Peyote use is leading to more productivity among the Osages. Where Zitkala-Sa tries to make the case that Peyote use is incompatible with Christianity, Lookout aligns the religious practice with what Congress expected from assimilated, “civilized” Indians. Outwardly, Lookout speaks the language of capitalism and settler colonialism to defend Peyote use as a basis for religious practice.

Upon closer examination, however, his use of the term “back-life” is particularly powerful when we consider traditional Osage cosmology, collected by Francis LaFlesche in the early 1910s. Francis LaFlesche (Omaha) worked as an ethnographer for the Bureau of American Ethnology and began researching traditional Osage religion in 1910. He, like Lookout, would testify in defense of Peyote based on his fieldwork with the
Osage.\textsuperscript{124} He had received his anthropological training while working with Alice Fletcher on her studies of the Omaha. Born on the Omaha reservation in 1857, La Flesche was aided in his studies of the Osage by similarities between the Omaha language and religious beliefs and practices (Bailey qtd. in LaFlesche 18). Bailey posits that La Flesche was also aided by historical circumstances; Bailey writes, “Osage priests would not, under normal conditions, have allowed an uninitiated outsider like La Flesche to record their most sacred and secret religious knowledge. The times were far from normal however” (qtd. in LaFlesche 18). During the reservation period, traditional rituals collapsed, and important religious knowledge passed away with the passing of older priests (Bailey qtd. in LaFlesche 18). Before LaFlesche began his fieldwork on the Osage Tribal Religion, the adoption of Peyote was well under way. Oral Testimony gathered in the 1930s confirms that John Wilson (Caddo) created the Big Moon variant of Peyotism. With consensus at the band level, Osage elders, Black Dog and Francis Claremore, invited Wilson to instruct the Osage in the new religion in the late 1890s (Swan 53, 54).\textsuperscript{125} Daniel C. Swan’s study of the historical development of Big Moon Peyotism amongst the Osage affirms that the adoption of Peyote was a response to \textit{ganitha}, social chaos. The Osage Tribal religion no longer had the explanatory power or social organization necessary to navigate through \textit{ganitha}; the adoption of Big Moon Peyotism represented a reorganization of tribal structure (Swan 67). The adoption of Peyote was swift: “At the beginning of the twentieth century, the peyote religion was introduced to

\textsuperscript{124} See Hoxie 79-84.
\textsuperscript{125} See also Speck.
the Osages, and within ten to fifteen years the vast majority of Osage full-bloods had converted” (Bailey qtd. in LaFlesche 4).

The swift adoption of Peyote affirms the Osage cosmological belief that nothing moves backwards. Bailey writes, “The peyotists demanded total abandonment of traditional Osage religious beliefs and practices…. For most families the break with the past was sharp and decisive” (LaFlesche 5). Abandonment of the old ways, necessarily effected a generational gap in Osage tribal knowledge. Undoubtedly, the swift, sharp break with the past could appear violent. Testimony included in Swan’s study describes one elder remembering that he would ask his parents to explain their tattooing (a tattoo ceremony being part of the old ways); he comments, “…they never would tell us why. They said that’s bad. We don’t want to talk about it” (62). However, Bailey’s framing of LaFlesche’s book *The Osage and the Invisible World* offers additional insight into this swift adoption. He writes: “What puzzled me was the absence of any readily definable continuity between the traditional Osage world described by La Flesche and the Osage world of the 1960s and 1970s. I knew that continuity had to exist, because the Osages still maintained a distinctive culture” (5). What Bailey learned is the endurance of a basic teaching by the ancient priests: “Nothing in the cosmos moves backward” (6). He writes, “Continuity in Osage culture was not to be found in formal institutions but rather in ideas, concepts, and beliefs…the basic social norms and values, as well as the general concepts of the world expressed in the teaching of the old priests, were alive and well in the collective minds of members of the contemporary Osage community” (6). Thus, while the adoption of Big Moon Peyotism created a vaccuum in knowledge of the Osage Tribal Religion, a distinct Osage cultural value of moving forward was transmitted. Lookout’s
fear of the back-life is no doubt a reference to the social disintegration of the reservation period. And yet, it is also a powerful reminder of the value of moving forward.

If Peyotists demanded a complete separation from the “old” religion, how then could Peyote in Mathews’s writing foreground transculturation and survivance? In both *Wah ’Kon-Tah* and in *Talking to the Moon*, texts separated by thirteen years and a trip to Mexico, Mathews develops the theological claim that Peyotism represents a transcultural force that bridges the passing of Osage Tribal Religion to Christianity. To explicate this further, I first turn to *Talking to the Moon*. On the one hand, Christianity represents the spiritual and cultural force of the colonizing Amer-European. On the other hand, the Osage Tribal Religion represents the socio-religious formation of a people indigenous to a particular land. Mathews describes the Osage Tribal Religion as a native religion, informed by and rooted in Osage land. He writes: “their religion, their concept of God, came out of my Blackjacks” (78). Mathews describes the Osage Tribal Religion as rooted to a particular place influenced by the environment and “fear of the elements and [their] enemies” (221). As he describes, the Osage Tribal Religion operated on a system of duality: man/animal, spiritual/material, sky (Chesho)/earth (Hunkah) (221). The Osage Tribal Religion comes out of man’s, to use Mathews’s language, observations of the sky/earth interactions (Mathews 221). This duality was “felt” and served as the intellectual basis for his religion (Mathews 221).

Unlike Zitkala-Sa, Mathews agrees that Peyotism amongst the Osage is a native religion. In several instances, he names it Wah-Kon-Tah Peyotism, reflecting its syncretic character (84). But Mathew uses a rather scientific term to describe Wah-Kon-Tah Peyotism: as an *adjustment* to Christianization (read colonization). He writes, “…the
original paganism of the blackjacks had to adjust itself through Peyotism to Europeanized Christianity” (emphasis mine 84). Later in the text, Mathews reiterates the term “...his social and economic organization was destroyed by the Amer-European during his exploitation of the new continent, and his religion adjusted itself to pressure which resulted in Peyotism” (emphasis mine 223). Mathews’s use of the term “adjustment” may imply that Peyotism is a result of an accommodation to Christianization, but a more charitable reading contends that it reflects his scientific training. Once again, Mathews describes a particularly social construction as a reflection of natural processes; in these instances, adjustment more closely resembles adaptation. Mathews stresses that Wah-Kon-Tah Peyotism is an adaption, a re-adjustment of Osage socio-religious thinking and practices in the face of the violence of colonization. As a re-adjustment, it is still a “native religion” (84) even though, as he writes, “in Peyotism there is both the old religion and Christianity” (85). This distinction is crucial to Mathews’s claim because the “old” religion, in a cosmological sense, has moved forward- accumulating and synthesizing Peyotism.

In practical terms, Peyotism did imply a complete separation from the past. Mathews’s ethnographic position lends him the distance to conceive of Wah-Kon-Tah Peyotism in syncretic terms. This scientific, outsider perspective is evident in a story he includes about the medicine bundles. Mathews describes that Spotted Horse, a tribal elder, sent his son to warn him about handling the sacred medicine bundle. Mathews includes the son’s direct speech: “...he says you must not open one of them bundles. He says youalltime ask too many questions about them bundles, he says. You oughtn’t to do that; it’s bad.... Osage have put them bad things away, he says. He says we must follow
word of Moonhead now” (85). In this encounter, Mathews learns that it is permissible to include the bundles in the tribal museum as sacred objects from the past but that he must refrain from opening or touching them because they are “bad.” Spotted Horse’s admonishment reflects a dominant understanding that the old religion was too weak when confronted with Christianity and therefore its medicine was bad (85). On the one hand, that Mathews can acquire the medicine bundles attests to their continued preservation despite religious oppression. On the other hand, the encounter illustrates how the text’s historical context opened up space for this type of encounter in the first place. During the publication of *Wah'Kon-Tah* and *Sundown*, native religious practices and objects were still effectively banned. Collier’s “Indian Religious Freedom and Indian culture,” published in 1934 represents the first expression in U.S. Indian policy to specifically grant Native American religious freedom.126

The encounter with Spotted Horse’s son exemplifies Mathews’s ethnographic persona as a collector and archivist of Osage culture. Regarding the medicine bundles, Mathews comes across as overly inquisitive and as messing with things from the past that should otherwise be left alone. Mathews’s outsider position regarding Peyotism is further illustrated in the way that he is not following Moonhead. In another example, Mathews outlines a methodology, a process for carrying out research, that he shares with anthropologists. To quote at length, he writes:

> I invariably say to anthropologists and others who come to study the Osage: “If you want to understand the old region [sic] of the Osage, first study carefully his natural background; then, after you have some understanding of that, his religion becomes clearer to you; when you understand the old religion of Wah-Kon-Tah, then study the lateral and

126 See Irwin and Prucha.
vertical pressures imposed by the invading Amer-European freed of his own European political, religious, and social pressures. You will then see why the new religion developed, the religion of Peyotism; and you will then have a better understanding of this new religion which is a mixture of the old religion of Wah-Kon-Tah and Christianity. (227)

This passage parallels the brief statement describing his project as a Guggenheim fellow interested in understanding “conflicting expression” in religion. He speculates that the natural environment influenced the formation of the Osage Tribal Religion and that colonization affected the development and spread of Peyotism amongst the Osage. Mathews contends that Peyotism is a “mixture” of two religions and that anthropologists must work to understand the old religion in order to arrive at a better understanding of Peyotism. In this formulation, Mathews upholds the importance of the past on the present, suggesting continuity.

On the other hand, Mathews observes that the Osage Tribal Religion is passing away, attributing two factors to this change: “natural” change and colonization. In the first instance, we can see how his training as a geologist informs the way he reads the natural/material world to formulate his theoretical apparatus. For example, he describes erosion as a slow-moving, natural form of change whereas Christianization is faster-moving (Mathews 84). He describes both processes of change as a form of “earth drama” that have been going on since time immemorial. He writes: “I feel that I have been extremely fortunate to be a witness to the last struggle of a native religion, and certainly my daily life in the blackjacks has been influenced as much by this struggle as by any other struggle for survival. The passing of a concept of God seems to be almost as poignant as the passing of a species” (84). In this instance, Mathews intertwines natural change and change induced by colonization. The passing away of a species is part of a
natural evolutionary process: species may pass away or evolve the necessary traits for survival. At the same time, species may pass away because of human influence; Mathews provides evidence of this form of passing in both Wah’Kon-Tah and Sundown. Mathews cannot help but contend with the human-induced change. He writes: “I have been intrigued for the last ten years with this cleaning-up activity of militant, devouring Christianity; the cleaning out of the machine-gun nests of the native religion…” (84). In this instance, Mathews mixes militaristic and natural metaphors to describe colonization’s affect on the Osage Tribal Religion and Peyotism. The nest symbolizes the native religion as a space of dwelling- it is a home, carefully composed of local and natural materials. In contrast, Christianity is cleaning up and clearing out these nests with the symbolic force of machine guns.

_Wah ’Kon-Tah: The White Man’s Road_ anticipates Mathews’s transcultural thesis, but it is represented with narrative techniques. Although Peyotism traveled to the Osage during the reservation period, Mathews defers any mention to it until the final chapter of _Wah ’Kon-Tah_, in the aftermath of Indian Agent Laban Miles’s death. Mathews introduces Peyotism through the character Eagle That Dreams. Eagle That Dreams is a Peyotist with a conical Peyote church on his ranch to hold ceremonies. In this chapter, Mathews represents a theological dispute about monotheism and ritual. One character argues that Moon Head, understood as a Kiowa peyotist who brought Full Moon Peyotism to the Osages, is a god and insists that altars and burials should face west (318). As he talks, he draws a Peyote altar in the dust with the image of a crescent

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127 John Wilson “Moon Head” was Caddo not Kiowa; he is sometimes identified as Caddo and Delaware. The most likely explanation of this error is that Mathews may have
moon (318). To the first claim, Eagle That Dreams disagrees and argues that Moon Head is not a god; he says, “I remember when Moon Head came to Osages. He was only man. He was Kiowa- Kiowa is not god. He was great dreamer, but he was only man” (318).

Eagle That Dreams also affirms east facing altars and burials, a direction that greets the morning sun. Another character chastises the first, saying: “You ought to know that Indian has only one god who is son of Great Father” (318). Mathews interrupts his response with narration, writing: “He lifted the great cross which he wore suspended from his neck and which hung under the gorget carved from the fresh water mussel, the gorget which represented the sun, the god of day” (319).

Although Eagle That Dreams has the final word, Mathews’s intervention calls attention to religious syncretism. The Peyotist dresses himself with both the symbol of the Christian cross and the gorget. Mathews’s narration aptly points out the gorget’s symbolic significance to the old religion. This dialogue illustrates internal division regarding Peyote theology and ritual, a debate that hinges on its proximity to Christian and Osage notions of god. Can a man be divine? Is there one god? How can one god have two forms? In the Osage Tribal Religion, there was but one god, Wah’Kon-Tah the creator although Mathews makes reference to Grandfather Sun and Father Fire (T 221).

had only limited knowledge about Peyotism amongst the Osage in the early 1930s. In The Osages, Mathews writes that Black Dog insisted alters should face west, a move to preserve traditional Osage belief that one traveled with Grandfather Sun toward Spiritland in a westward direction, following the sun (746).

128 In The Osages, eastward facing altars are associated with Christianity. Altars in Big Moon Peyotism have east and west facing altars. It appears that Mathews includes this east-west question in The Osages to demonstrate that Moonhead changed his initial idea about east-facing alters when confronted by “Osage self-convictions and assurance” (746).
This example captures a translation problem, a hiccup in what would otherwise appear as a neat and tidy process of “adjustment.” Does Wah’Kon-Tah, the traditional concept of god, translate to God the father or to Jesus the son? Is Moonhead like Jesus, teacher or god? This dialogue points out a complex theological problem, but it would be a mistake to equate Eagle That Dreams’s final word with the authors. Mathews does, however, illustrate continuity to foreground Peyote as a transcultural bridge. The gorget and cross, however symbolic of religious mixture, offer a visual and material reminder of cultural change and continuity. Indeed Eagle That Dreams’s affirmation of the east- his final words in this dialogue-further reflects continuity with an important traditional practice of morning prayer.

At the end of the narrative, Mathews explicitly refers to the ritual of morning prayer to affirm and lament Wah’Kon-Tah Peyotism. To set up this resolution, Mathews depicts Eagle That Dreams preparing funeral arrangements with the Indian agent. In the final section, Mathews depicts Eagle That Dreams waking up and preparing for the morning ritual. Mathews endows Eagle That Dreams with much symbolism to navigate the tension between affirmation and lamentation. The tone in these three short paragraphs is solemn, and Mathews’s careful attention to detail further slows the pace to enhance the solemnity. For example, Mathews observes that “he sat for a moment” and “he slowly dressed” (312). Mathews notes Eagle That Dreams’s traditional clothing of

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129 “Notes on the Osages” is a supplementary text that offers a cursory look at Osage history chronicling Osage-settler contact beginning in 1673, treaty-making, and the reservation period. I refer to this material because even though it is included after the last chapter, it does not continue with the numerical designation. Because of this, I refer to chapter nineteen, “Eagle That Dreams” as a conclusion to the historical narrative offered in Wah’Kon-Tah.
moccasins, leggings, and breech clout as well as his “tattooed chest,” a reference to a traditional practice that adherents to Peyote had stopped (321). Once he is dressed, Mathews focuses on his hair. He writes:

“He took up a comb and parted his long gray hair carefully – along the red line running down the center. For some time, he looked at the red line which was the symbol of the straight road which he traveled each day. Each day as he combed his hair he was reminded of this straight road which was red as the symbol of dawn; of the sun; red the color of fire which was the Father from which all things come.” (emphasis mine 321)

Traditionally, Osage men wore a headdress called a roach. A roach was made of porcupine hair and fastened to the head with a braid and buckskin strap (Callahan 69). In the text, Mathews comments that the practice ended with Peyotism (315). But just as long hair served as an outward symbol of the peyotist, Mathews draws attention to continuity with the old. His careful description links the “new” hair parting with traditional Osage religious symbols: the sacred color red, Grandfather Sun, and Father Fire.

When Eagle That Dreams is ready, he steps outside to greet the sun with his morning chant; he prays for a long life and a lodge filled with meat (food) and children (posterity). The chant ends with the sentence, “may I live long on earth, that my feet may travel straight in roads of earth – ” (emphasis mine 321). Mathews cuts the chant short with a dash. The dash captures in aesthetic terms the metaphorical use of the term travel to indicate living a good life on earth and the afterlife. This final scene offers a powerful affirmation of Wah’Kon-Tah Peyotism through Eagle That Dreams’s body, clothing, and ritual as well as the rising sun. Even his name symbolizes the yoking of the two; the
sacred eagle symbolizing the Chesho/sky world is linked to the world of dreams, the realm of Peyote. Yet, this is also a death scene. An elder and peyotist has passed away.\textsuperscript{130}

\textit{Wah’Kon-Tah} and \textit{Talking to the Moon} attest to Mathews’s ethnographic gaze on Peyote that has identified it as a transcultural spiritual response to \textit{ganitha}. Where \textit{Wah’Kon-Tah} draws on the power of symbolism and dialogue between peyotists, \textit{Talking to the Moon} reflects Mathews’s Chesho/sky world thoughts as he formulates a systematic study of the Osage Tribal Religion that would form the foundation for \textit{The Osages} (1961). The history of Peyote in the U.S., lends support to Mathews’s claim. Dating from the Progressive era onwards, Peyote was a traveling material good whose sacred qualities helped communities create spaces of dwelling and formulate new spiritualities. This Peyote circuit necessarily strengthened bonds within and across Indigenous communities, demonstrating a modern, transindigenous circuit of sharing.

\textbf{Spiritual (Dis)connection in Sundown}

\textit{Sundown} is of particular interest because it has generated criticism from within the field of Native North American studies and American studies, particularly through the study of ethnic modernism. Considering that Major Laban J. Miles’s notebooks are not available to the public and thus it is difficult to gauge how “literary” \textit{Wah’Kon-Tah} is, \textit{Sundown} is Mathews’s most explicitly fictional text. Kalter notes that it is “Sexier than the realist poetics of \textit{Wah’Kon-Tah}... [its] modernist allegiances…also please

\textsuperscript{130} In both \textit{Talking to the Moon} and \textit{Wah’Kon-Tah}, Mathews speculates that Wah’Kon-Tah Peyotism will either give way to Christianity or secularization even as his writing indicates it is alive and well. This contradiction in his writing is perhaps unavoidable; just as he observes the secularization of the Osage Tribal Religion, he also observes its transfer to Peyotism.
contemporary critics because Mathews here seems to be talking about “the present” rather than nostalgically about “the past” (27). Kalter’s passage interests me because of its assumptions about modernist texts; they are generally considered aesthetic rather than political, linguistically and formally experimental and most concerned with “now”—the modernist present having been a defining feature of the aesthetic tradition since Baudelaire. Excavating the novel’s attention to Peyote can help broaden our understanding of its modernism, to show more clearly how its past bears on its present and the way that community healing and religious transcendence links the novel to a wider transindigenous modernism.

While there is a robust body of criticism around Sundown that accounts for the social implications of modernity (allotment, big oil), little work has focused on the spiritual crisis resulting from displacement. Carol Hunter (Osage) argues that Mathews viewed Challenge’s generation as “tragic victims” of assimilation. Hunter interprets the conflict between Osage and Euro-American values in the novel to pathologize Challenge as the racialized misfit. She writes that he becomes “psychologically crippled, emotionally stunted, and incapable of expressing his own character” (Hunter 324). Considering the pseudo-autobiographical nature of the novel, Hunter’s hermeneutic pathologization of Challenge is highly problematic for its reliance on racialized conceptions of the Osage/Euro-American binary. Warrior writes of her interpretation that, “in spite of her keen historical insights,” Hunter’s language of victimization “is a barrier to uncovering what Mathews perceived was happening to Chal Windzer and his generation” (55). He calls into question Hunter’s categories of victimization and tragedy because they frame the narrative tension as an “either/or of assimilation or remaining
traditional” (48, 82). Warrior writes that Chal’s existential dilemma is only one point amidst an entire community’s process toward change and reorientation (85-86). In Warrior’s reading of the novel, he posits that Mathews understands that “land and community are necessary starting points for a process of coming to a deep perception of the conflicts and challenges that face American Indian people and communities” (85).

Christopher Schedler offers the most explicitly “modernist” readings of Sundown. Schedler traces the trope of the impotent artist-hero, describing Mathews’s modernist aesthetic as a blending and questioning of received Osage and Euro-American traditions to “experiment in new ways of expressing a modern American-Indian identity” and the American novel (FNA 128-129). Schedler explicates the text’s modernist influences and highlights Mathews’s use of vernacular and free-indirect discourse as strategies of Native storytelling. Sundown exemplifies “border modernism,” a critical term Schedler develops to describe the work of writers outside the metropole; border modernists stress historical, geographic, and linguistic vernaculars. Hanna Musiol critically intervenes in discussions of Sundown to demonstrate how the novel offers an alternative genealogy- a (petro)modernity- of the “liquid modernity” posited by theorists of late-capitalism.131 Highlighting the oil boom in U.S. industry and cultural production, Musiol draws attention to the protagonist’s “impossibility of social becoming” (Musiol 366). She writes that Mathews disrupts conventional notions of the Bildungsroman as a genre about progress by representing Chal as “neither fully “Indianiz[ing]” nor “civiliz[ing];” the inability to express himself challenges the expectations of who he should become (Musiol

131 Musiol draws from texts such as Zygmunt Bauman’s Liquid Times: Living in the Age of Uncertainty (2007) and Richard Sennet’s The Culture of New Capitalism (2007).
Musiol’s work builds from Jennifer Gillan’s reading of Chal. Gillan’s work focuses on how allotment of Osage and other tribal lands reconfigured gendered tribal roles and structures into patriarchal ones to assist the formation of the nuclear family. Gillan draws attention to the language of independence and individual (purchasing) power that policymakers used to convince American Indian peoples “to give up their collective social, economic, and cultural institutions” (Gillan 2-3). For Gillan, Chal mocks Christian, bourgeois assumptions of received gender roles, and serves as a “challenge to the credibility of the federal government’s promises to Indian tribes” (20).

As the sun rises with a death scene in *Wah’Kon-Tah*, Mathews moves to the setting sun with a birth scene in *Sundown*. Mathews begins the novel exquisitely, with a first sentence that affirms the power of the old religion. Mathews writes: “The god of the great Osages was still dominant over the wild prairie and the blackjack hills when Challenge was born” (1). In this sentence, Mathews captures a world yet unchanged by Christianity, Peyotism, and secularization. The novel begins with a strong sense of assurance and great anticipation. Challenge was born into a familiar world, one in which Wah’Kon-Tah is “still dominant” and the natural environment is still “wild.” Mathews undercuts the assurance quickly by pointing out the dim, red light shining out of Chal’s mother’s room. Mathews leaves no room for guessing its significance: the light is “faint” and “half-hearted… as though it were a symbol of the new order yet diffident in the vivid, full-blooded paganism of the old” (2). The world is not as familiar as the first sentence suggests. It is a world divided into old and new, progressive and traditional, mixed-blood and full-blooded. Chal is born into a divided world that no longer reflects
the secular binary thinking and ordering of the old. When it comes to Peyotism and Osage Tribal Religion, Chal is an outsider.

In some form or another Chal is always in the dream world, as Mathews strongly associates him with Chesho/sky imagery. This Chesho existence begins for Chal at a very young age with his love for birds, role-playing and later in his work as a pilot. Mathews writes that Chal’s childhood was one of action and contemplation, but a contemplation “mostly in the form of dreams wherein he played the role of hero” (9). Chal even feels pain because of his Hunkah/earth nature: “Sometimes real pain would be the result of these dream-world metamorphoses; pain caused by the desire to fly over the green world high in the air, like the turkey vulture and the hawk…. It was a hopeless feeling of inferiority in being earthbound” (Mathews 9). Chal’s feelings could be interpreted as infantile or naïve, but this interpretation would dismiss how these feelings continue to persist well into adulthood. Because Chal is absorbed by his Chesho existence, he never fully lives in the Hunkah/earth world: he has trouble expressing himself, connecting with others, completing his studies, and working. Chal is uninterested in day- to- day existence, and his turn to alcoholism after the war confirms his withdrawal from the world around him for the out of body experience he desired in flight. Chal lives the “back-life” in large part because his life is out of balance: too much sky and not enough earth.

The black market of alcohol and drugs, an effect of Prohibition, further creates a social space of nonmovement based on addiction. In one section of the novel, Chal buys corn whiskey from local bootleggers and learns that bootleggers and drug dealers are in competition with the doctors. A young, female bootlegger remarks, “…someuh these new
doctors that has been comin’ intuh town are commencin’ to take my trade [of snow] away” (Mathews 248). Chal had heard about this competition from his childhood friend, Black Elk, who claimed to buy his heroin from a doctor. Chal remains incredulous and mutters to himself, “Who ever heard of a respectable person like a doctor sellin’ dope?” (249). He brushes off both of their comments because in his mind, the girl is not respectable and Black Elk is “drunk most of the time anyway” (Mathews 249). Black Elk is later murdered by a group of white criminals seeking to consolidate and inherit Osage wealth. Chal, like Black Elk, becomes trapped in alcoholism. Mathews writes, “…he wanted more whisky. He felt that he must have a drink. Every nerve in his body called for alcohol, and his head was bursting. For three days he stayed half intoxicated, cowed by the craving that suddenly came upon him” (250). The historical context of the novel sheds light on how the period of the “the Great Frenzy” signals a social shift for Osages. As more settlers and business people enter Kihekah, many Osages are caught in the margins of an economy of oil and addiction, an economy that sheds light on the tradition/modernity binary from out of which the Peyote movement intervenes.

Chal’s unbalanced life is an effect of his disconnection from a religious community that can help him interpret his feelings and better understand the road he ought to take. As a child, he is drawn to the color red. It is his favorite color, and only later in life does he learn of its sacred meaning as the “color of the Sun, who was Grandfather, and of Fire, who was Father, and of the Dawn, sacred to Wah’Kon-Tah” (13). In another example, he is drawn to an image of Jesus. Mathews narrates: “there was a picture of Jesus in white robes, floating among the clouds with a great red heart…This was his favorite; Jesus was certainly not bound to the earth like other things without
wings” (18). These two examples, among others, speak to Chal’s implicit connection to the “old religion.” Mathews represents this connection as innate, even natural, to Chal. However, Chal never seeks to deepen this connection through engagement with social or religious practices even as his childhood friends do so.\footnote{See for example Sun-on-his-wings and Black elk’s revival of the ritual of defiance and sacrifice (81-82).} What occurs is Chal’s ever deepening isolation, which manifests as alienation from knowledge of his own body and self. In one instance, he is overcome by a mysterious feeling: “a mild fire seemed to be coursing through his veins and he felt that he wanted to sing and dance; sing and dance with deep reverence” (73). Chal experiences a feeling of religiosity. He is overcome by fire (the father) and a desire to dance. Chal would experience this feeling several more times in the novel, while at university, at Osage social dances, and on a drinking binge.\footnote{See pages 124, 257, and 295-296.}

Mathews explicitly relates dancing with community engagement and Peyotism, which heightens Chal’s outsider position. In one example, Chal takes two white girls to see the Osage social dances before their night of partying. The girls had asked before hand, and suddenly Chal feels overwhelmed as if “he was betraying his people” (253). The social dances, as Mathews narrates, were done out of “amusement” (252). In other words, they were secularized versions of ancient rituals. He writes: “they danced because they felt it impossible to give up that last expression of themselves” (252). This example is notable because Chal comes face to face with his own outsider position. The dancers recognize the desire for self-expression is a manifestation of the spirit; they dance because they have to. Chal, on the other hand, has felt this same desire for self-expression but withdraws.
Much of Chal’s withdrawal is bound up in racialized terms. Mathews uniquely makes race a factor of disconnection in the text. Whereas *Talking to the Moon* elaborated a theoretical claim, *Eagle That Dreams* in *Wah’Kon-Tah* is a traditional, “full-blood-” his race is unquestioned by Osages and whites. Like the mestizo of chapters one and two, Chal is a “mixed-blood” and is thus considered closer to whiteness than indigeneity. While race adds another complex layer to understanding Chal’s outsider position, it intersects with religious practice and community engagement. The historical record indicates that “full-bloods” were the largest demographic converts to Peyotism. Chal remembers that “when he was old enough to dance he was in high school, and he hadn’t wanted the people at the high school to think he was uncivilized” (260). Chal’s distance from the Peyote community is on the one hand due to his own withdrawal. He is afraid to be associated with indigeneity, because in his time, it was a sign of being primitive and uncivilized. This fear is a result of internalizing the colonizer’s racial hierarchies: in short, coloniality. Chal’s withdrawal is also an example of the larger structural barrier to his integration that comes from a world divided in two. His mixed ancestry and the geographic distance from the “full-blood” villages would affect his potential for engagement. Rather than an indictment on the Peyote community, however, Mathews draws further attention to the consequences of a world divided by colonialism.

Mathews entices the reader with the idea of Chal’s potential integration into a religious community. Setting Chal’s desire for (re)making Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections at the social dances underscores his desire for spiritual connection. We can appreciate this move in light of *Talking to the Moon* wherein Mathews includes
anecdotes about the social dances. In the first instance, the dances represent the various divisions of the tribe coming together; members from other tribal nations are often encouraged to attend. In the second, the dances themselves are prayers through their interpretation of the natural environment (land and animals). Mathews writes, “...in its dignity and fervency the dance is still a prayer. It is still a prayer to Wah’Kon-Tah of the old religion, notwithstanding the symbols of the Peyotism with which they adorn themselves” (83). After Chal watches the social dances, he dreams of performing his own death dance (264). This dream temporarily moves Chal to seek out his childhood friend, Sun-On-His-Wings who had danced with such “religious gravity” (257). Sun-On-His-Wings had become a peyotist as a young adult just as Chal moved in the opposite direction toward a more secular, white life. Upon meeting, Sun-On-His-Wings invites Chal to the sweat lodge even though he is not a peyotist (267). Mathews writes that Chal “was buoyed up by his drinking and he believed he wanted to see the Peyote ceremony” (267). He sips the buckeye root tea that will help him purge his stomach of evil (268-269). When Chal returns inside, he is calm and can think clearly. Considering that this is the few times he can think straight, Mathews links religious transcendence with clarity of thought. He listens to the others.

Because Chal cannot attend the Peyote ceremony, the sweat lodge offers a powerful example of the community support he lacks. While in the sweat lodge, Chal listens to a discussion between a father and a Peyote Road Man. The father wants to seek

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134 See Talking to the Moon 78-83. Mathews’s discussion about the dances is set alongside one illustration of a dancer and Drum Man.

135 Mathews was known to attend the social dances. He notes, “Here I pick up many stories of the jealousy between Peyote factions…” (79).
revenge for the murder of his son (Black Elk, Chal’s childhood friend) and of other family members by white people seeking their wealth. Following the peyotist principle to seek no revenge, the Road Man explains why he should refrain. The Road Man explains that there are multiple roads: the old one, the white one, and the bad road, which deceptively looks like the white man’s road (271). The Road Man affirms that they need to follow the old road; thinking about revenge prevents thinking and fighting to keep their place on earth (275-276). Mathews offers this extended speech to illustrate the Peyote community’s relationships, knowledge, and wisdom. The Road Man helps ease the mourning father’s burden at the same time that he interprets *ganitha* (social chaos) and offers a teaching for community healing. This example of interpretation underscores how religious transcendence links people together through ritual, ceremony, and conversation. The Road Man’s teachings also demonstrate the connection between land, community, and spirituality since affirming religious values is part of maintaining their place in a divided world. These practices and values are all notably absent from Chal’s life of binge drinking even though he desires to connect with them. Through Chal’s gaze into a Peyote lifestyle, readers learn that he most clearly lacks the community support to interpret his thinking and dreams and help him adjust to a changing world with multiple roads. Wah’Kon-Tah Peyotism, to use Mathews’s terminology, is a modern Osage way of linking Chesho and Hunkah.

**Conclusion**

The tragic, slow-moving novel *Sundown* has received much critical attention but the Peyote dimension has been neglected. With Peyotism as an interpretative lens, Chal’s
alienation and desire for self-expression is more clearly read as a consequence of his isolation from a community in its own process of healing. In *Sundown*, Mathews touches upon the human dimension underpinning the spread and development of Peyotism among native communities in the U.S. But as, *Wah’Kon-Tah* and *Talking to the Moon* illustrate, Mathews was also interested in exploring its intellectual dimension as an example of social and religious change. These works, and the historical North-South development of Peyote highlight an important way of reading the transcultural dimension of religious syncretism. Mathews shows that a transcultural religion is not just a simple mix or bridge of two forces, but a powerful weaving together of multiple, traveling cultures to help practitioners travel across spaces transformed by violence and change.
I want to offer an ending to this dissertation by reflecting on a few points that have emerged most saliently after the labor of researching, writing, and editing. To begin, I offer two passages. The first, from James Clifford: “When is a gap in knowledge perceived, and by whom? Where do “problems” come from…?” (18) and the second, from Jace Weaver by way of Craig S. Womack: “Ruppert writes as an Amer-European about Native Literature, so mediation becomes important to him as an entry point” (RT 85). As a mestiza scholar, how is it that I have come to perceive “gaps” in Indigenous Studies? In the fields of American Studies and Latin American Studies that I bring together by way of Indigenous Studies? Considering that mediation, travel, cosmopolitanism, and Indigenous afterlives are important vectors of transindigenous modernism, how do I square it with the literary nationalist paradigm of doing tribal-centric work? Are these my “gaps,” my points of entry? And why?

*Transindigenous Modernism* began with the problem of modernist appropriations of the Indigenous Other for its self-definition. This problem revealed a large gap in the modernist canon, that of the powerful self- and collective expression within Indigenous communities. Thus, through archival research and exploring under-examined texts, I selected mestizo and Indigenous-authored texts to explore this tension and to privilege the Indigenous expression produced within tribal-national, nation-state, and transnational frames. These texts have revealed more “gaps.” Did these authors and artists meet each
other? And if so under what circumstances? Where are Indigenous women writers and muralists and their contributions? In some way, this selection of authors further supports the way that nationalist discourse, Indigenous or otherwise, was largely construed from an elite male perspective. Despite these gaps, this dissertation offers a language to uncover the intellectual, material, and spiritual connections between Indigenous peoples from two settler nation-states in the Americas.

Thus far, I have argued for a transindigenous modernism to identify a robust body of aesthetic and intellectual work written by American Indian and Indigenous Mexican writers. The term transindigenous modernism describes an anti-hegemonic, Indigenous aesthetic tradition rooted in historical, geographical, and tribal-centric particulars with North-South routes of cultural, material, and spiritual affinity and connection. By defining transindigenous modernism as an anti-hegemonic tradition, I draw attention to how Indigenous survivance (Gerald Vizenor’s term) works against settler colonial state coercion and the manufacture of consent as formulated by Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci. The post-revolutionary, inter-war period of the 1930s is particularly suited to this analysis because of Mexican and U.S. Indigenismo, a discursive and policy-driven ideology with hemispheric ramifications to assimilate Indigenous peoples through modernization and to revive their cultures through visual, literary, and ethnographic production. The latter emphasis on cultural revival led to important gains from within Indigenous communities such as increased educational opportunities and the promotion of Indian arts and crafts. But the historical record maintains that these efforts were largely planned by non-native elites in efforts to improve Indigenous communities from the outside while buoying nation-state consolidation and modernization.
By beginning with José Clemente Orozco’s mural *The Epic of American Civilization*, my aim was to unpack the discourses of indigenismo and mestizaje as central to the formation of modernist aesthetics. The 1930s, a period generally referred to as the “end” of high modernism or a transition to “postmodernism,” represents an aesthetic shift towards social realism and the politicization of art, a legacy of the Mexican mural movement of the 1920s. Through the production and circulation of Mexican mural art, I contend that the Mexican muralists also mediated the “regimes of representation” which simulated the Indian for Mexican and Anglo-American audiences. In addition to Vizenor, I intentionally refer to Sheila Marie Contreras’s theory, drawing from Gayatri Spivak, about the construction of Chicana/o indigenism through European and Anglo-European writing. Orozco is particularly unique in the way that he exposes Mexican indigenismo as a mestizo formation. Nonetheless, Orozco was drawn to the power of mestizo rhetoric to shape the Americas, which we see rendered in his representation of the “Modern Industrial Man” panel at Dartmouth.

In moving to work by Todd Downing (Choctaw), Andrés Henestrosa (Zapotec) and John Joseph Mathews (Osage), I demonstrate how Indigenous writers shaped an alternative modernist tradition that privileged Indigenous agency, knowledges, and histories. Their work provided Indigenous afterlives (a term I revive by way of Chadwick Allen and Bill Reid) to Indian simulations. These simulations encapsulated in terms like mestizo, mixed-blood, full-blood, and Indian/indio result from Anglo-American and Mexican literary and visual modernisms during a time of “ethnographic modernity,” Clifford’s term to describe a scientific-aesthetic system that sought to study primitive cultures as a response to the cultural fragmentation incurred from bourgeois modernity.
Todd Downing, attuned to mestizo-Indigenous relations, saw a unique difference between Mexico’s indigenismo and its U.S. counter-part. Because he saw Mexico (the contemporary nation-state) as first and foremost Indigenous land, he interprets the same nation-state history represented in Orozco’s mural from the lens of Indigenous resistance to colonialism. By self-consciously creating an American Indian narrator from the North, Downing points to affinity with Indigenous Mexicans, an important strategy that can also be used to reflexively read the North. Andrés Henestrosa’s work draws attention to specific translation problems when working with terms like sovereignty and the tribal-nation. His efforts in *Neza* to revive Zapotec literature and language, exemplify how the Zapotec intellectual community sought cultural autonomy while also seeking to work within and alongside the Mexican nation-state and the Spanish language. In my readings of John Joseph Mathews’s texts, I focus on his construction of an ethnographic gaze to theorize and assess Peyote’s impact on the Osage Nation. Because of the way that the Osages modified Peyotism and adopted it as a response to *ganitha*, we see the making of an Indigenous afterlife for Osage spirituality that foregrounds Osage futurity. These cosmopolitan, Indigenous, intellectuals interpret, revive, and appreciate Indigenous cultural forms while often mediating and contextualizing these forms within settler nation-state and Western aesthetic frames. In weaving their work together, mediation and travel are shown to be important vectors of transindigenous modernism. These authors intellectually and physically traveled along a North-South circuit between two settler nation-states and a greater Indigenous Territory.

My academic interest in Indigenous Studies has developed alongside my research in Latin American Studies and American Studies. Drawn initially to questions about
identity, landscape, and migration outside of Indigenous Studies, I came to understand that the histories of settler colonialism manifest across the Americas and in early twentieth century literature in profound and unexpected ways. My own complex family histories: stories of Native (great) grandmothers, as well as forgotten stories due to the de-culturalization of Indigenous peoples dispersed across nation-states, inform my personal history and research interests. My maternal grandparents’ stories about Alabama and Guanajuato resonated within me a historical and geographical sense of immediacy that influences my approach to Indigenous literature. These stories, told by my grandparents who raised me, draw attention to the way that narratives and memories of loss and pain around issues of indigeneity affect generations. For me, these stories are not about mythical figures from the past, but are reminders that my own research promotes strategies for thwarting the myriad forms of violence endemic to ongoing settler colonialism. I am interested then in Indigenous-to-Indigenous connections, how they are read and interpreted within Indigenous communities, and the potential for mestiza(o) contributions to Indigenous Studies.

*Transindigenous Modernism* thus reflects my personal and research interests. In her introduction to *Translocalities/Translocalidades: Feminist Politics of Translation in the Latin/a Americas*, Sonia E. Álvarez describes the anthology as an exploration of the “multidimensional crossings and movements” of Latin/a feminist discourses and practices (2). Shaped by “translocal” subjects, that is researchers who shift across geographies and subject positions, she describes their nickname and metaphor, the *translocas* to express their physical dislocation and the conceptual madness that arises
from it (3). The metaphor captures “the movement of bodies, texts, capital, and theories in between North/South and to reflect the mobile epistemologies they inspire…” (Álvarez 3). As a transloca/translocal subject, my way of reading the texts I selected is informed by the multiple frames of my worldview. Beginning with the mestizo muralist, however, I wanted to challenge celebratory notions of the traveling mestizo as interlocutor and mediator who is somehow capable of articulating the best of “both” worlds. Orozco offers much to the study of modernism, namely in his critique of ongoing settler colonial violence but he has his gaps like the rest of us. My reading practice also emphasizes the physical and intellectual travel of the Indigenous authors I studied. This emphasis demystifies assumptions about Indigenous provincialism, an assumption that only works to support colonialism, and reveals translocal subjects committed to Indigenous politics at multiple scales. What this dissertation makes visible are the multidirectional geographic, intellectual, and spiritual circuits of travel: Indigenous writers bringing their roots to the study of local cultures and other cultures, and in this way engaging with tribal-nation, nation-state, and transnational formations. Here, we see the modern, Indigenous cosmopolitan. Theorizing this new/old subject position with Anthony Appiah’s notion of the “cosmopolitan patriot,” Maximilan C. Forte writes, “…there is no point in roots if you cannot take them with you” (8).

The notion of roots brings me to my second point, that of intellectual sovereignty as a limit of translocal epistemologies. Robert Warrior’s concept of “intellectual sovereignty,” defines an approach to critical Native studies in the North that aligns literary criticism with tribal-nation political sovereignty. “Intellectual sovereignty” refers

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to a process-centered intellectual and research driven approach to working within and for American Indian communities. Warrior writes, “We see first that the struggle for sovereignty is not a struggle to be free from the influence of anything outside ourselves, but a process of asserting the power we possess as communities and individuals to make decisions that affect our lives” (124). While intellectual sovereignty rightfully privileges Native criticism to interpret Indigenous-authored texts, it also looks outward for its conceptual strength. Warrior and other literary nationalists such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Simon Ortiz, Craig S. Womack, and Jace Weaver have worked to fill in a “gap,” represented in the problem of non-native intellectuals defining Native studies. When placed side-by-side with a translocal politics and practice, literary nationalists draw attention to the local. Place-based intellectual “locations,” signified in tribal-centric work, stress reciprocity and accountability to Indigenous peoples. In this sense, the mestiza(o)/transloca(o) subject has an important community to listen to. If we do not adequately theorize dwelling, to summarize Stuart Hall’s critique of Clifford’s “Traveling Culture,” than translocal research risks assimilating the Indian once again.
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